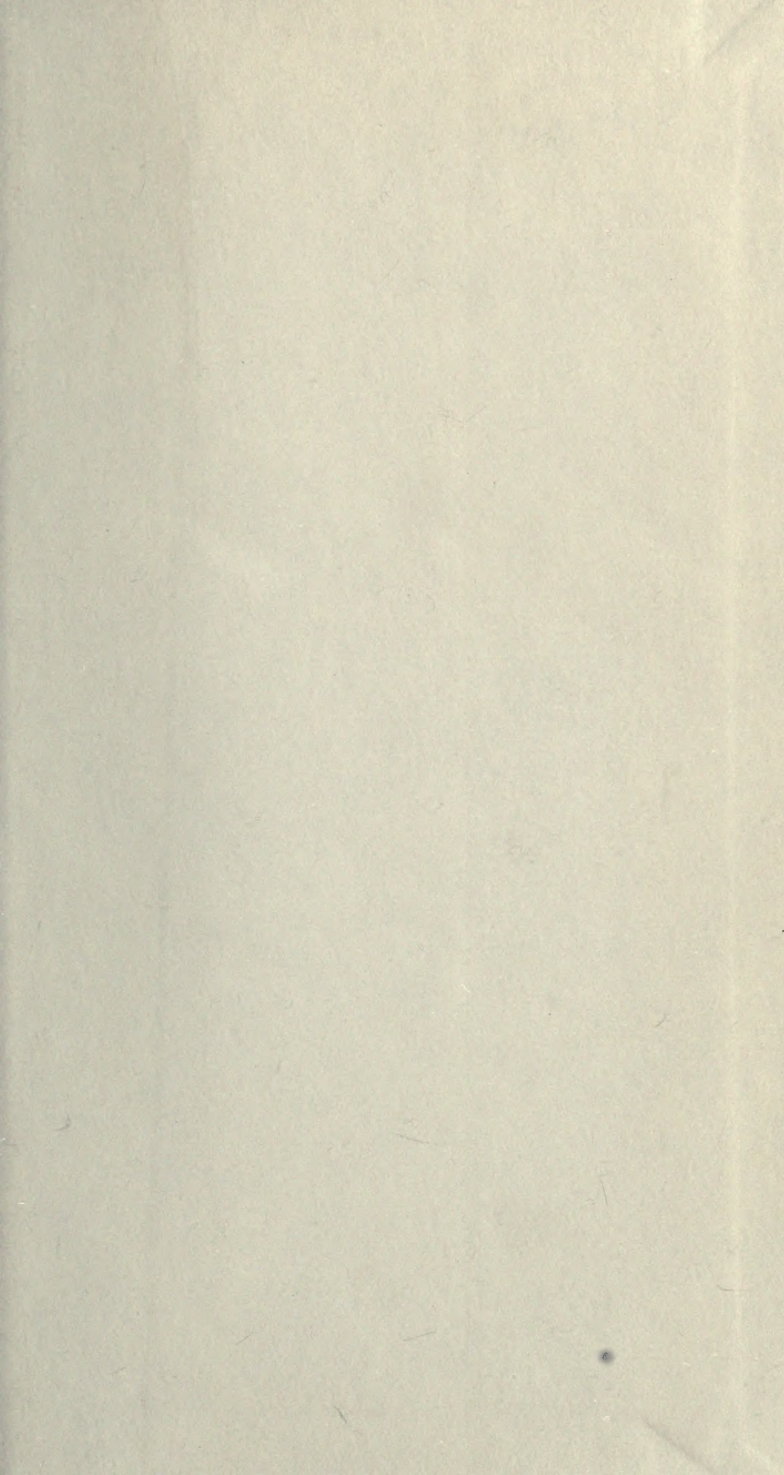





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GAMBETTA

AND THE FOUNDATION OF THE
THIRD REPUBLIC

.BY

HAROLD STANNARD M.A.

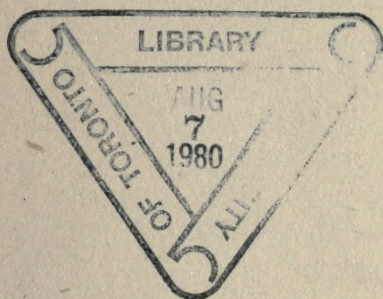
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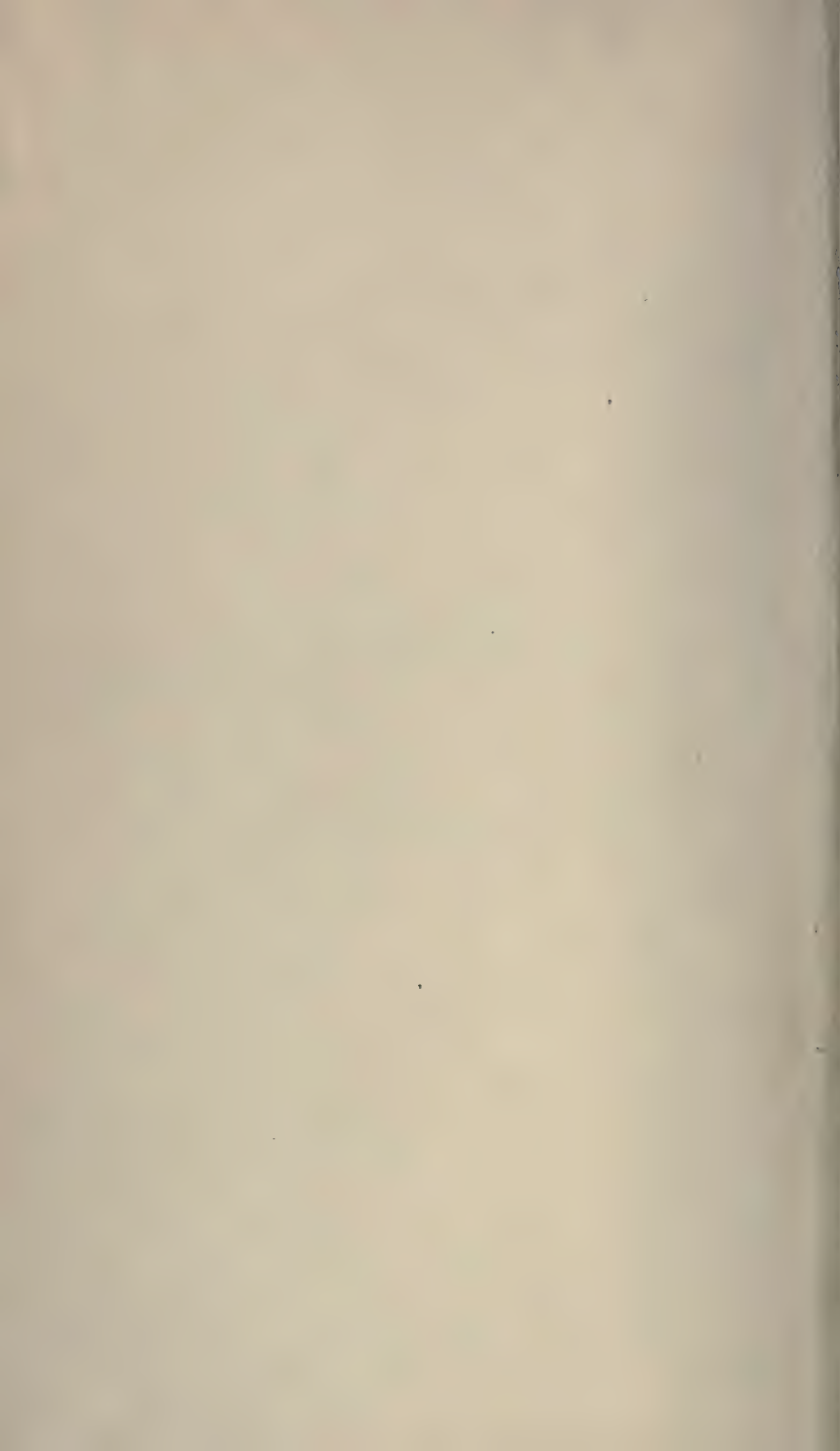
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GAMBETTA



GAMBETTA

AND THE FOUNDATION OF THE THIRD REPUBLIC

PART I—THE EMPIRE

I

PARENTAGE—HOME LIFE—EDUCATION

IN the year 1818 Baptista Gambetta, a Genoese of the village of Celle-Ligure, near Savona, resolved to leave his native coast and settle in the interior of France. He came of a race of seamen who for generations had traded across the Gulf of Lyons with cargoes of macaroni, oil, and pottery. But the loss of a brother in a storm had filled him with disgust of the sea, and though he was minded to return home in later life and to die with the sound of her waves in his ears, he determined to give his sons the chance of lives beyond the range of her caprices. His choice fell on Cahors, a famous old town lying about a bend of the river Lot, some seventy miles north of Toulouse. The place had lost much of the ancient prosperity along with which it had acquired, as a line in Dante reminds us, its harsh mediæval reputation for usury, but was still a flourishing market centre, and Baptista Gambetta must have had frequent business relations with it. Thither he transferred himself with his family—three boys, of whom the youngest, Joseph, was only four years old—and on the edge of the market square opened a shop, the Bazar Gênois, for the sale of groceries and pottery which he had formerly handled as freight.

The family tradition sent the boy Joseph to sea. When ten years old he sailed as cabin boy on a French ship bound for Valparaiso. In addition to her visible manifest the vessel

had in her cargo no small part of the future history of Europe, for Garibaldi was one of her officers and she carried as a passenger a young Italian priest, the Abbé Mastai, later to be called Pius IX. But the world then knew nothing of names afterwards to be so famous, and, had the ship been lost with all hands in rounding Cape Horn, would never have guessed that the course of its destinies had been changed by the wreck. As a matter of fact the voyage was uneventful. The cabin boy returned safe and sound, but with no love of travel. His experiences gave a savour to his conversation in later years—he was as good a talker as was to be expected of the father of such a son—but he never again expressed any wish to abandon his easy-going course of life in rural France. In due course he took over his share of his father's business, and in 1837, being then twenty-three, married Marie Magdaleine Orazie Messabie, a chemist's daughter. The couple made their home over the shop, and there, on 2 April, 1838, a son was born to them, Léon Michel. His second name, which he never used in later life, was given him in compliment to his paternal uncle, but the first, which the child's career was to prove such a happy inspiration, appears to have been freely chosen by his parents. A boy and a girl make an ideal family according to French bourgeois views, and the Gambettas' happiness was rounded off by the subsequent birth of their daughter Benedetta.

His marriage definitely committed Joseph Gambetta to France, but neither when it took place nor in later years did he apply for naturalization papers. Accordingly his son, born on French soil of Italian parents, had his choice of citizenship, and opted for France in the year he came of age. But in all respects save its legal nationality the Gambettas' household was typically French, and the boy's environment throws some light on the man's thought and policy. His parents, the shopkeeper's son and the chemist's daughter, belonged by birth and temper to the middle class which first asserted its power in 1830, and became the dominant force in European life in 1848. Gambetta's origin thus placed him in general sympathy with the spirit of his time, but because he sprang from the humblest section of the middle class he had no difficulty in establishing intimate contact with the working folk whose mouthpiece he was one day to become. A trifling circumstance determines his parents' place in the social scale.

The French tradition forbids a woman of the humbler class to wear a hat as she goes about her daily marketing ; and it was not until after Gambetta had delivered the speech which made his name ring through France and had paid a triumphal visit to his birthplace, that his mother first assumed the bonnet in which, in her old age, she gave herself the pleasure of being photographed. Gambetta's position on the border line between two classes, maintained as it was during years when the events of the Commune had made class consciousness acute, enabled hostile critics to label him opportunist. In fact, however, he was the true son of his parents, a conservative democrat, seeking to enlarge but not to demolish the structure of the French state, an enthusiastic reformer but never a revolutionary.

There is no record that the boy passed through a sickly infancy, but when eight years old he nearly died of peritonitis. He recovered, but his health was never re-established, and all his work was done in defiance of physical weakness. His magnificent spirit enabled him at every crisis to triumph over his ailments ; but such triumphs are hardly won, and his physical condition explains the peculiar quality, at once abounding and spasmodic, of Gambetta's energies. He paid the price exacted of those who kick against the pricks of indifferent health, for he was old and worn out when the internal trouble of his boyhood finally carried him off at forty-four. This early illness was thus of more far-reaching consequence than the celebrated accident ¹ which befell him three years after his recovery. He was watching a cutler friend drilling a hole when the steel snapped and the pointed end, flying off, entered the child's right eye. The sight was totally destroyed, and the local doctor thought it best to leave Nature to heal the mischief as she chose. Her method was to coat the damaged eye with a thick white film, which made Gambetta look like a cyclops. Eighteen years later the evil consequences of this neglect became apparent, and the sight of the remaining eye was threatened. Gambetta, now in Paris, obtained good medical advice, in obedience to which the useless right eye was removed,

¹ In some accounts the dates of the illness and of the accident are reversed. I follow M. Gheusi who had access to the family papers. The contrary order is based on the statement made by Joseph Gambetta just after his son's death. But the old man's memory may well have played him false, especially at such a time.

to the great inconvenience of his pocket but to the great improvement of his personal appearance.

The lad's mother, whose influence on her son's whole life was as powerful as it was unobtrusive, is alleged to have taught him his letters ; but she did not charge herself with the whole burden of his early education, for he was only four when he was sent to a school kept by the Pères du Sacré Cœur de Picpus, one of whom was eventually murdered in the Commune. The choice indicates no specific religious attitude on the part of the parents. It seems to have been the only infant school available, and the fact that his father supplied it with groceries secured the boy's admission at a reduced fee. After five years' attendance he was withdrawn and sent to the seminary of Montfaucon. Here again no religious motive was at work. This school, too, was among the father's customers, and fear of losing its patronage, combined with satisfactory terms and the fact that a larger establishment was better suited to a growing lad, induced him to make the transfer. Legend, however, which at once gets busy with a man of Gambetta's origin and character, has it that the boy threatened to destroy the sight of his remaining eye unless he was withdrawn from priestly control. It is a pretty story, but the accident occurred almost midway through the boy's term at the seminary.

Besides, the good fathers were doing their work well. Gambetta's earliest letters, which belong to the Montfaucon period, are full of Scriptural references. With a child's quickness in imitation he has exactly caught the parsonic tone, though a hint of his mature temperament is given by the zest with which he tells a story. To this time belong his first political opinions—all expressed with characteristic emphasis. He followed the moving events of 1848 with intense interest. Cavaignac was his hero, and he was unrestrained in his abuse of Louis Napoleon, who was as stupid as an ostrich, and had a foreign accent. All this was much to his father's taste, but the lad went too far when he burnt the hated Bonaparte in effigy, a piece of daring for which he narrowly escaped expulsion.

His characteristics are reflected in what record has been preserved of his progress. The first prize he won was for reading, and he was at his best in history, Latin, and composition. He was intelligent, mischievous, observant, quick, and a little idle—in sum, a thoroughly normal bright boy. He was never more true to himself than when he incurred a reprimand

for his slovenly appearance. This was a defect which he did not trouble to overcome in later life. When he first met Jules Favre in his early Paris days, the gulf which yawned between the bottom of his waistcoat and the top of his trousers horrified that respectable advocate. A disciple, who has collected anecdotal odds and ends about his hero, records that until 1877 he continued to patronize the tailor from whom he had bought his first Paris suit twenty years before, when his income was 100 francs a month. It is true that the President of the Chamber of Deputies no longer got his clothes ready-made, but his patronage would probably have continued to the end of his life had not his soldier-servant quarrelled with the shopkeeper. His one youthful vanity was his black hair. He wore it long and, as he talked, was in the habit of flinging his locks back behind his ears—an appropriately lion-like gesture. His carelessness in regard to dress was accompanied throughout his life by an indifference to comfort and food, itself surprising in a man of his poor health; but in the days of his official magnificence he affected good cigars, and sometimes pressed generous handfuls of them upon his visitors.

The family temperament asserted itself in his Montfaucon days. At twelve he had made up his mind to be a sailor, and his letters home defend his choice of a career with ingenious argument. They stamp him as already quite the little rhetorician, well qualified to appreciate the full secondary education he was destined to receive. His mother wanted her boy near her, and in 1852 he entered the Cahors *lycée*. Here he received that training in the humanities which consorts so well with the French tradition and which French schoolmasters are adepts at imparting. Under its influence his nature expanded. He was a leader among his fellows and won schoolboy notoriety as an anti-clerical. He became a good Latinist and a better Hellenist, and satisfied his taste for oratory by learning speeches of Demosthenes by heart. His memory for the classics never left him, and in later life he sometimes astonished his friends by quoting long passages with scarcely a fault.¹ Here again legend has done him an injustice. It will

¹ When Gambetta visited Cahors in 1881 his old form-master publicly declared that his pupil had been able to repeat all Homer. But allowance must be made for Gambetta's fame and for the lapse of twenty-five years. Most people, however, would find it easier to memorize a book of the *Odyssey* than one of the *Olynthiacs*.

have it that Gambetta was a rude man of the people until Madame Adam took him into her drawing-room and gave him polish. This is altogether misleading. Gambetta was a man of true though superficial scholarship and of strong, somewhat austere, artistic tastes which the ardours of political life never permitted him to indulge to the full. After 1870 he took frequent and sympathetic note of the contribution which French art was making to the revival of his country's glories. He was in touch with the literary thought of his time and in his more mellow years quite won the hearts of Flaubert and Daudet, fastidious men whom he had at first antagonized by the rough provincialism of his speech, dress, and manner. Sculpture particularly appealed to him, and he loved the theatre. Coquelin was his friend, and he was once so foolish as to intervene in a stage squabble. For music he cared nothing—the drum was his favourite instrument and the Marseillaise his favourite tune—but he had a sure eye for a picture. His appreciation of painting developed early. There has been found among his papers a letter—presumably, and doubtless wisely, never despatched—signed Léon and addressed to Ninette, of whom nothing whatever is known, not even her full name, though she may be identical with the Ninon to whom the twenty-year-old Gambetta addressed a poem which one of his biographers has cruelly disinterred. It is a love-letter of sorts, and proves its writer an indifferent lover, but emphatically no boor. The letter is dated “Bruges, Tuesday, 4.30 p.m.” The visit to Bruges was paid before Gambetta was sufficiently well known for his movements to be chronicled, and its exact date is uncertain. M. Reinach, whose authority on such a matter it would be imprudent to contradict, dates the letter about 1865, but its tone permits the suggestion that it may be somewhat earlier. Léon begins by assuring Ninette that he is burning to write to her, and that though the pen is detestable he would sooner write with the tip of his finger than forego the pleasure. After this promising start he plunges straight into Flemish pictures, thus:—“Van Eyck is, I think, greater, stronger, more awe-inspiring than Memling; inferior to him in delicacy and artistry but superior in power, thought, and range. I told you yesterday that Memling was an elegant sensualist, a lover of the kindness and lavishness of nature but without religious feeling; Van Eyck is very different. He is a true saint in the Church's sense of the word; religion is his passion, even his

mania. He sees and feels that nothing is so lofty, so compelling, so desirable as love, the love of Jesus and of His Mother. He ignores his surroundings in order to fling himself into the mid-waters of that divine ocean. This is the quality that makes saints, and our artist bestows all his passionate energy on the expression of religious love and of the ecstasy of prayer. The Virgin is the object of his special devotion which enables him to give such manifold expression to the tender feeling which warms her heart." There follows a detailed description of the Van Eyck Madonna; the portrait of the clerical donor, in particular, is discussed with an accuracy and an interpretative sympathy which no art critic could wish to better.

Thus the man of, perhaps, twenty-five; the youth of eighteen, being less developed, appears better balanced and more mature. In 1856 Gambetta went with his father to visit his relatives in Italy, and informed his mother of his experiences in a series of attractive letters. They are marred, indeed, by occasional trite reflections upon the effects of railway construction and the general condition of Italian affairs, but their writer's discursive enthusiasm, his keen eye for nature and architecture, and his shrewd sketches of his family, make them interesting enough to eyes less indulgent than a mother's. Here is his account of the climax of his journey: "Although chilly and unresponsive in his manner to people whom he does not like, cousin James is all the kinder and more talkative to his friends. He is a typical seafaring man—always with some thrilling yarn to spin, and talks in delightful style though his range of words is not great. He has given us the run of his house, which is admirable both for situation and comfort. It is an old restored mediæval palace, on the peak of a mountain in the Apennines, surrounded by olive trees and vines. The house overlooks a deep valley, green all the year round and just now looking particularly charming. The olive trees are laden with fruit, and round their branches twine vines whose black and white clusters mingle with the pendant green olives. The two mountains which enclose the valley are cultivated in terraces, now enamelled with exquisite flowers with here and there an orange- or a lemon-tree to offer the tired traveller shade, perfume, and golden fruit with which to quench the thirst often caused by the burning sun. . . .

"Genoa is the city of palaces. We saw huge edifices built entirely of marble, with gigantic statues at every corner, open

spaces like gardens with marble pavements, fountains and rocks, all strawberry strewn, from which streams gush out. But all this is nothing in comparison with the Church of the Annunciation. It is just like a huge ship upside down with a white marble portico 200 feet high. The interior of the edifice is old and its walls are cracked. Grass grows in them, and judging by appearances no one would wish to enter. In we went, however, and thought we should never get out again. Picture to yourself an endless vista of arches covered with gilding, frescoes, lapis lazuli, porphyry. . . . No room for more." (29 September, 1856.)

II

EARLY PARIS DAYS

THE Italian holiday ended Gambetta's schooldays, and the question of his future had to be discussed. His father was ready with the obvious solution. There was a nice little business waiting for his son to step into. But his mother, true to her social type, had more ambitious views. The boy must study law, and in no less a place than Paris. The Mayor of Cahors lent her his influential support, the father's objections, though not stifled, were overruled, and at the beginning of 1857 the young man left for the north. Throughout the first three years of his Paris life, Gambetta had to combat his father's arguments in favour of his return home, and found them all the harder to meet because the hand that penned the disagreeable advice also doled out the cash which alone enabled it to be disregarded. At first the elder man enlarged on the superior advantages of business. It offered a free and independent life, whereas the young barrister had to flatter his clients and beg favours of the leaders of the bar. To this Gambetta, who always revelled in an argument, replied that a shopkeeper had to court his customers, and went on to contend with considerable earnestness that, as he had once been allowed to become a student, it was no more than fair to let him take his degree. This was his consistent view in spite of occasional bouts of homesickness. "Is your garden growing gay with the daisies of spring?" he writes at the end of April. "Are the roses opening their crimson buds? Are the orange trees and verbenas scenting your rooms? Is the hot-house well stocked with flowers? Has the vine begun to bud? And the cherry and the apricot—do they make Benedetta look forward to a little good work with her teeth? Do the pear trees show their clusters of white blossoms? Has the sweet basil popped up its little green head all ready for the heartless cook to tear off and plunge into the *menestra*

with its golden bubbles?" There is sincerity behind the rhetoric; but the last phrase permits the inference that Gambetta did not find life in Paris in the late spring to be utterly destructive of good spirits.

When the student had qualified—his thesis, in Latin and French, discussed points of mortgage law—the father returned to the attack with the suggestion that he should come home and practice at Cahors. Gambetta rejected the proposal on the ground that a small provincial town offered him no scope; but it may be surmised that his heart was already beginning to be given to politics. The father, not yet beaten, came forward with a new scheme of a doctor's degree, to be followed by a professorship in some Southern university—Toulouse for choice. Gambetta was himself the original begetter of this plan, for in February 1860, he had written that he hoped to devil for a leading barrister, Maître Dufaure. "If I am unlucky," he continued, "if I go under, I shall give up practice, devote myself to Roman law, return to the schools, and in five years become professor." But when the project was seriously mooted from home Gambetta disposed of it by failing in his first examination for the doctorate. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that the failure was deliberate, since he had passed all his other examinations with ease and distinction in spite of persistent ill-health during the winter of 1858-9. In fact Paris had already gripped him. In the previous year he had begun to make a tentative name for himself by newspaper work contributed to the "*Opinion nationale*." It is characteristic both of his sense of family duty and also of the severity of the Napoleonic government towards advanced opinions, that he let one of his early articles appear anonymously because the paper went to press before he had received his father's consent to put his name to it.

Money was, of course, the pivot on which his relations with his father finally revolved. His allowance at this time seems to have been 100 francs a month, supplemented by occasional gifts from his mother and his aunt. To satisfy his father that this sum, which appeared considerable to the simple and rather close-fisted provincial, was judiciously expended, Gambetta let his letters home overflow with intimate little details such as are of no account to history and are therefore especially dear to the biographer's heart. Here is his description of his quarters at the Hôtel de Var, Rue Tournon, at which he

settled after short experiments with other lodgings. "You ask me for particulars concerning my mode of life and my lodging. I gladly throw open my hall door to you. It will seem to me as though I were showing you my house which in reality is not so bad after all; but I will refrain from asking you to sit down at my table which is none too good. Never mind. Do your duty come what may. So, you see, here we have a room four yards square, ornamented with a clock which has never gone; a chest of drawers, the drawers of which it takes a conjuring trick to open; an armchair once crimson and downy and now colourless and very hard; a bed which does all right, for when I lie down on it I want to get to sleep; and a grate in which no fire is ever lit by me because my funds won't run to it. . . . So luxurious do you say? Yes, dear father, I forgot to tell you that I have a mirror and red window curtains which brighten the room much as the little instrument called an extinguisher increases the light of a candle when placed on its wick." Further details are followed by an account of his meals, "the worst part of the whole affair. I make a very frugal breakfast—the most frugal breakfast imaginable. It consists of a roll, value one sou. On Sunday I treat myself to two rolls. I must also tell you that if I wake early at 6 in the morning, I get up late at 11 or 12; and then by virtue of a mental process called abstraction or in business language and arithmetic, subtraction, I act as if I had only been awake since 11 or 12. I drink a glass of water and go and attend different lectures until 4.30. At 5 I dine, and I don't know what I eat; but that does not matter. I then pay 17, 18 or 20 sous, go out, buy a little roll for a sou, and return to the library. At 11 I eat my roll sopped in water. I am not yet sufficiently advanced along the path of salvation to water it with the sweat of my brow; besides, winter prevents that operation; but we shall see what happens in July or towards the end of August. You see that I have taken your advice. I am steady and regular in my habits—of work I mean, for that is the only luxury I allow myself." (17 February, 1857.)

The cost of living, or rather of his one important daily meal, is prominent in Gambetta's correspondence from the first. Before he had been a month in Paris he reports joyful news. The price of his dinner had fallen to 18 sous, for the proprietor of the restaurant which he patronized had agreed to give a regular customer a reduction of two sous in the franc. "So I

shall save 3 francs every month of thirty days, and 3 francs 10 centimes every month of 31 days. At the end of the month I shall be able to buy myself an extra book. Meanwhile I should much like all the months to be hotter but not longer than the one which will soon be here. I must confess that my life in a fireless room halfway to heaven, with the north wind blowing, is not exactly luxurious; but I have your dressing-gown which, by reminding me of your kindness, helps me to remember that you are still there to prevent me from freezing to death. I sit on my bed, fold the blanket over my feet, prop myself up with the bolster and work as well as if I were in M. de Lamartine's study." (30 January 1857.) Add that he shortly brought his dinner bill down to 13 sous, wine included, that his plans for the winter vacation included earning a little money by correcting Greek proofs in a printer's office, and that to save his candle he undressed by the light of the lamp outside, and the general scheme of his early Paris days is fairly complete.

What was he thinking about? To some extent his letters help us. To the end of his days Gambetta was a true son of the Midi, and as such, liable to fall a victim to the temptations of a bit of rhetoric. Moreover he was a republican of the Revolution and in sympathy with its emotional candour. The modern Frenchman, consciously the child of the Revolution, has no scruple about uttering his feelings; whereas in this respect the modern Englishman still prefers the tradition of the French aristocrat. Gambetta was a Frenchman, and expressed himself after the sentimental romantic idiom current in his youth. Perhaps in 1857 even a hard-headed old father did not smile over such a passage as the following:—"I beg you to make my sister" (the poor child was now well advanced in her teens) "learn by heart every morning, never at night, a page of poetry or prose, and then say it over to you. This practice is full of benefits. First it will have splendid effect on her memory—mankind's most precious quality. Next it will improve her mind, which is well adapted for this pursuit, for I think it very cultured. Lastly it will teach her style and spelling, and at the same time will enable her to repeat from time to time on the banks of some river, on the summit of some mountain, the verses of some of our poets." (25 March 1857.)

Another letter, in which Gambetta thanks his father for the gift of his watch, may be quoted as a reminder that the

temperament which we readily label Victorian was more than insular in its manifestations: "When I wear it (the watch) I shall feel as if it were one of the companions of your youth who is telling me about your long life of hard work and spurring me on to prove myself worthy of my Father. . . . When I look at its face with the steel hand moving round slowly but surely, I think of your affection and your care for me, as steady and watchful as time itself." (6 April 1857.)

In maturity Gambetta never recurred to this stilted vein. But he remained a reader of the orators of the Revolution. Mirabeau, the anniversary of whose death fell on his own birthday, and whose bust was the only ornament of his study, was his hero and to some extent his model throughout his life. This revolutionary influence, accentuating his own genius, helps to give his later speeches their notable clarity and directness; in his earlier days it lent a touch of archaism to his style.

At this period, too, Gambetta acquired the habit of reading articles in the better class magazines—the "Revue des deux mondes" for choice—and of writing out an analysis of their contents, with passages that specially appealed to him copied out in full. It was in this way that he became acquainted with the substance of Spencer's "First Principles" and it may have been in this way that he acquired his first knowledge of Auguste Comte. (In later life he was an avowed Positivist and must presumably have read the master at first hand.) Of French literature in general he seems to have read relatively little, being content with his beloved Rabelais whom he delighted to quote at length. In later years he permitted himself a rare personal extravagance and bought the historic copy which the Regent Orleans had been in the habit of carrying to church. The classics never lost their appeal to him. Cicero "De Oratore"—a dialogue too little read nowadays—was a special favourite and he was fond of citing the great orator's maxim that there is no full eloquence without philosophy. He also acquired an interest in ancient history and showed the practical turn of his mind by ranking the Gracchi above the tyrannicides.

This quality was the basis of his constant goodwill towards the most practical of peoples—the English, whose political thought and institutions he now began to study. He was tolerably familiar with Buckle's "History of Civilization," and examined in some detail the working of local administration

across the Channel. These were the days before the Local Government Acts, and Gambetta was concerned to find out how a system under which the chief county authorities were not elected was compatible with popular freedom. "The sheriff," he writes, "as the instrument of the central executive, has some analogy with our prefect, but instead of being the chief magistrate of the county has an altogether subordinate position. This is proved by the method of nomination; he is chosen by the Queen from three candidates presented by the justices of the peace." And here is a characteristic note:—

"Of the 11,728 benefices in England,
 1,144 are in the gift of the Crown,
 1,853 [" " " diocesan bishops,
 6,092 " " " private individuals.

[WHAT FEUDALISM !]

But there was also another phase of his life of which there was no mention in his letters home. His work did not monopolize his thoughts; and even his work was not always germane to his studies; for what business has a would-be barrister with a course of lectures on the Italian poets? From the beginning of 1859 Gambetta began to take an increasing part in the public life of the Quarter. Besides frequenting the Fleurus, a café beloved of artists, he was known at the Procope which, with its associations with Voltaire and Danton, was a fitting haunt of the straitest sect of young Republicans.¹ Daudet, himself a newcomer to Paris and still unknown, admired from a distance this young man who "was always on the go, and always seemed to be smelling gunpowder." His exuberance was certainly unrestrained. Gambetta was a man of great physical strength which, when his funds allowed, he displayed by smashing a marble-topped table with a blow of his fist. The clubs of the Quarter, too, began to know him for a political firebrand and a speaker of most promising audacity. He became the head of a troop of friends, mostly southerners, and as boisterous as himself. Sometimes they eased their feelings by a hard row up the river, but their taste mostly ran to gatherings with much noisy and uncompromising talk. Gambetta was

¹ To the end of his life Gambetta frequented cafés. After he became famous he was to be found at the Café Madrid, which he later abandoned for a café curiously named the Capital U.

always a great talker, but he had also the gift of listening. He would sooner listen than read, and any form of eloquence appealed to him, not excepting sermons.

The group discussed everything, usually adversely, and when criticism palled, indulged themselves by writing occasional verse, their chief himself abetting. It is typical of the man that he was at first an enthusiast for Mistral's revival of the provençal dialect as tending to exalt his beloved Midi, but later frowned on the movement as likely to encourage separatist tendencies in a France which could not afford to palter with her unity.

A young man with a gift for comradeship and hosts of friends cannot live on a hundred francs a month, helped out by occasional gifts from his mother and by the casual proceeds of freelance journalism. A crisis was inevitable; it came late in 1860. The proprietor of an eating-house which Gambetta patronized had allowed him to run into debt to the tune of 500 francs. Spread over four years the sum is not large and would doubtless have been paid off as soon as the beginnings of a practice allowed a little money to accumulate. But the creditor suddenly became apprehensive and sent in his bill to old Gambetta at Cahors. There was serious trouble, and the suggestion of a practice at home was vigorously revived; but Madame Gambetta intervened with a way out of the difficulty. Her unmarried sister, Mlle. Jenny Messabie, was willing to go to Paris and keep house for the young spendthrift. "Aunt Tata," a business-like old maid, who doted on her nephew, and whose immense energies were kept within bounds by a slight limp, held Gambetta's domestic affairs in her very capable hands until the day of her death in 1878. Aunt and nephew settled at first in the Rue Vavin with some furniture, the gift of Gambetta's father, and two mattresses which they bought for 63 francs. Gambetta reported these as a bargain, but felt the need of more chairs. Other comforts were also lacking. "We shall only drink cold water until you send us some wine," wrote Gambetta to his father early in May 1861. The wine was acknowledged three weeks later in a letter which gave the dimensions of a carpetless bedroom and announced the purchase of half a dozen chairs for 42 francs.

By the autumn Gambetta was beginning to get busy with cases, and the couple moved to rather more spacious quarters in the Rue Bonaparte. "I will now describe our lodging to

you. It is on the first floor. . . . The hall serves as dining-room and waiting-room. Then comes our drawing-room which is at the same time my study, then your son's bedroom, then Tata's room where I have placed the chest of drawers. Behind these four rooms is a long, newly papered and wainscotted passage where we have made hanging-room for our clothes. The tiny kitchen is at the end of this passage and is lit from the staircase. The cellar is big enough to hold 2 or 3 casks of wine ; at present it only contains packing cases." (31 October, 1861.)

In this little flat, and in Aunt Tata's company, Gambetta's real career began. The new arrangement eased his father's mind but did not ease his pocket. With a maiden aunt to back him, Gambetta only became more persistent in his importunity. "While waiting for success, I beg you to encourage me," he wrote in July 1861. "Human life," he continued sententiously, "is divided into two periods. Until they are 30 years old, children are helped along the road by their fathers ; after that then it is the son's turn to be the prop of his father's old age. Give and take—what touching reciprocity." The reader of this letter may have been touched, but was doubtless aware that the counter-obligation thus admitted would not take effect for another seven years.

Gambetta never cared for money and never cared to acquire the gift of making it. In the last year of his life, although he was the most famous man in France, and although his personal expenditure had always been on a most meagre scale, he had to ask for twelve months in which to pay for the tiny cottage he had just bought at Jardies. That he was in tolerable circumstances when he died was due to the great success of the newspaper, the "*République française*," which he had started, without thought of gain, to propagate the republican idea. Shortly before his death his friends the Adams had made a financial arrangement which gave the founder a fair share in the profits of a venture for whose flourishing condition his own energies and patriotic insight were mainly responsible. But in the 'sixties there was no money in republicanism, and as Gambetta did not allow his straitened finances to keep him at work in the courts to the exclusion of politics, the operation to his eye in 1867 seriously disturbed his budget. As late as 1873 he repaid his father 2000 francs, the last instalment of a loan made just after the Franco-Prussian War.

On the other hand the crisis of 1860 left Gambetta determined to make good. In an angry letter his father had dubbed him a "wine-shop orator," and the phrase stung. After protesting that he had not heard from his father for two or three months, and after urging that he was doing his utmost to get work and that his past errors were the fruits of his southern temperament with its extremes of energy and laziness, Gambetta let his heart guide his pen. "I will triumph over my disposition; I will build fewer castles in the air and, as you so rightly wish, will be more sensible and business-like: but for pity's sake give me breathing time. . . . My hour has not yet struck. . . . I have not always, it is true, worked with clock-work regularity; but I swear to you, and I am not mistaken, that during my bouts and spasms of hard work I have picked up more ideas, have taken in and remembered more facts, than many of my seniors with all their regular but half-hearted daily studies. I have had positive debauches of hard work, and the spells of ease which followed were necessary if I was to digest the mass of new material. I have perhaps learnt more by this method than by daily progress at an ant's pace. I do not say this out of conceit but because I am sure of it. Thanks to my character that is how my brain works." (9 October, 1860.) The whole letter is a passionate piece of self-justification. It was altogether true, and it is pleasant to find that it did not fail of its effect. A fortnight later Gambetta acknowledges "your sweet, fatherly letter; those three pages contained your whole self with its blend of captivating sympathy, irresistible kindness, excellent advice and rather severe criticism."

The Gambetta legend has drawn a picture of a hard-hearted, narrow-minded, close-fisted father, utterly unworthy of his son, whose early struggles he made unnecessarily difficult. The picture is false. The elder man's face, with its shrewd, obstinate, refined features, full of dignity in spite of the Newgate fringe which surrounds them according to the rural fashion of the time, is itself sufficient answer to the charge that he was a petty huckster devoid of sympathy and understanding. Taciturn he certainly was, and his long silences must have grated on a son who was himself so prompt and eloquent with the pen; but after all, he was most careful to preserve the very letters which he did not acknowledge. In truth it was because the father so intensely appreciated his son that he delighted in his company, longed to have him near him, and aspired, not ignobly, to guide

his undisciplined intellect. In his heart he knew that his boy belonged to France, and gave him without reserve. But the legend has this much truth in it, that the old Italian could never do full justice to France—that France which his son had saved and which repaid him first with abuse and then with neglect, so that he died a disappointed man. In death the father claimed him harshly, without so much as a glance for France mournfully recognizing his greatness too late. But even that stern old heart relented in the end and sanctioned the eventual transference of the illustrious dead from the family vault to the Pantheon. The feud between Joseph Gambetta and France is healed now, and all that need be remembered of the father is his devotion to his son. The relations between the two men were true and tender. There is nothing conventional in the affection with which the younger fills the birthday letter which the elder received every year on 19 March, and even in his callowest youth Gambetta writes to his father of his political dreams as to a man who will surely understand.

III

THE YOUNG REPUBLICAN

SIX months after his first arrival in Paris Gambetta poured out his political aspirations in a letter home. "Italy is in labour ; France is awakening to political life ; the dawn is coming ; let us wait until the day breaks. I wish I could read the future. It must be so beautiful. Oh, Father, congratulate yourself, we shall soon see fine things. The time is near. The present Government may go on for two more years but by then it will have got to the end of its tether and, ruined by the very *coups d'état* which enable it to exist, will succumb to the first blow from the nation's arm." (But Napoleon III had other plans for 1859 ; and only his blind eye prevented Gambetta from fighting for him in Italy.) "What important questions will have to be settled ! What new and essential theories propounded ! What noble plans, what vast enterprises, what glorious successes ! For we cannot but succeed. Our opinions, the daughters of a past of sorrow, are pregnant with a future of hope and must eventually give birth to the happiness of mankind. But first they must be developed by study. Education must widen the knowledge of them ; men must make them known and everyone must respect and honour them. . . . One science alone shall be taught, political economy ; one altar alone shall be erected, to humanity ; one principle alone, order ; one society alone, the world. . . . But you will smile, perhaps. I am too impetuous, it is true. Only the people suffer so, that I may be forgiven if my pity runs away with me." (9 June, 1857.)

This letter—as it were the gaseous nebula from which Gambetta's whole political system was subsequently evolved—shows that from the first politics threatened to displace the law as the chief interest in Gambetta's life. For eleven years, however, he was able to drive the two tandem, the law helping him politically, since throughout the 'sixties opposition

to the Second Empire was more easily conducted in the courts than in the subservient legislature or the muzzled press. But it was a political effort which first made his name known outside his own circle. In June 1861, on the occasion of the death of Cavour, he wrote a manifesto, "The Youth of France to the Youth of Italy," which, he wrote home, "has been reproduced by every newspaper in France and Europe." A passage in which "the grandsons of 1789" urged Italy "to keep faithful to Victor Emmanuel" showed that the writer's republicanism was of no doctrinaire brand. The tone of the document made it possible for the Italian Ambassador to accept a copy and to invite its author to dinner. Gambetta joyfully reported the news. He thanked his father for having given him a good suit of clothes to go in, and seized the occasion to develop the remarkable theory of financial reciprocity quoted above.

From this time onwards his reputation steadily grew in republican circles in Paris. "I think that things are looking up; in fact I am sure of it," he wrote later in 1861, and in the following year—memorable in his biography as marking the beginning of his friendship with Spuller—he reported his successes in letters to his mother full of gratitude and devotion. He was getting to know the politicians of the left—Favre, Picard, Arago, Ollivier—and began to frequent the galleries of the House. The five Paris deputies, who then formed the opposition, welcomed him as a stimulating ally and liked him to be present when they spoke. His father looked on approvingly and, as a sign of his goodwill, visited him in 1862 for the first time since he had settled in Paris. The young man's spirits continued to rise. "I am beginning to make a place for myself in the world," he wrote home in the spring of 1863. "My circle of political acquaintances grows wider every day; I now know all the influential supporters of democracy." His keenness gave him courage. Being perplexed—and no wonder—at the method of presenting the French budget, he resolved to get an explanation from the best available source, and burst in, with all his young exuberance, on the kindly but somewhat startled Thiers. This was the first meeting between the two men whose relations were to be of so much moment to the political destinies of France a decade later.

His capacities developed. He discovered his talent for electioneering, and in 1863 campaigned in the provinces with vigour and success; while in Paris, where there was no longer

any spade work to be done, he heartened the attack by capturing a meeting convened to support the Government candidate. But not all his delight in opposition blinded him to the increasing menace of the foreign situation. As far back as 1863 he presciently observed that the Emperor wanted peace but would not be able to restrain the militarists of his own party. In 1865, about the time that Napoleon III was beginning to plan his last desperate adventure of the liberal Empire, his critic concluded that the régime was tottering. "We are sailing quickly towards the future; the present Government has now been in existence for thirteen years and is still discussing its constitution and its origin as if it only dated from yesterday. That is a sign of approaching death. Only watch and wait." And again, in the same year: "And then they still say that the man is ill. An accident may happen, death strikes swiftly. This man's life is the thread upon which everything hangs. If the thread snaps, what will become of us? That is an important question but it will not be answered until three days after the catastrophe." But when the catastrophe finally befell, though it was infinitely more terrific than "the man's" death, Gambetta himself was to answer the question, and in one day.

His language grows more sombre as he feels France drifting towards some undefined disaster. "A terrific storm is brewing somewhere in Europe. Both the Empire and the Emperor are unsettled. The different political parties are taking counsel of each other, and before many months are over we may expect an outburst. Whither are we going?" (October 1866.)

But it was through the law that Gambetta found his best friends and his great chance. Clément Laurier was at this time the leader of what may be called the opposition bar. A man of more brains than grit, he seems to have discovered in Gambetta a possible master. He proved a good friend to the struggling barrister, took him out, helped him in journalism, gave him a taste for the theatre, invited his company in journeys to the East and to England—where he probably presented his friend to the Orleans princes. Laurier was always an Orleanist at heart, but Gambetta attracted him towards republicanism. His new faith stood the strain of 1870. He joined Gambetta at Tours, acted for a time as his *chef de cabinet*, and afterwards went on a financial mission to London. But later on he broke away, helped to overthrow Thiers, and openly returned to his monarchist faith.

Gambetta's debt to Laurier was great ; but he had another friend whom he rightly regarded with feelings of deeper devotion. Adolphe Crémieux was one of those men who leave no mark in history but count for very much in their own day. All his life—and his years were prolonged—he was among the most honoured and honourable representatives of liberal Jewry. He was a boy of eight when Napoleon made himself Emperor ; his long and distinguished career at the bar opened under Louis XVIII ; he died a Senator, having seen his cherished republic successfully weather its first storms. A great liberal lawyer of calm and lofty spirit, he was not happy amid the stress of his own time and country. Had he been an Englishman, Mr Gladstone could not have found a Lord Chancellor more precisely after his heart ; but in France it was only reluctantly and from a sense of duty that Crémieux left the bar for the hazards of politics. He was Minister of Justice in 1848, and again received his old portfolio after Sedan. Five weeks later Gambetta found him at Tours, whither he had gone as a member of the original delegation, struggling with a burden of work far beyond his desire and capacity, and willing enough to hand over his excessive responsibilities to his masterful young colleague. For the rest of the war he confined himself to the innocuous activities of his own department.

The two men first met in February 1862. There was a meeting of the Conference Molé—the Parisian Hardwicke Society—at which Gambetta made a brilliant speech. At its conclusion, he reports to his father, “Daddy Crémieux (no one calls him by any other name) came up to me, shook my hand and embraced me. He wanted to know my name, my age, and where I was born. He congratulated me, predicted a most brilliant future for me and invited me to go and see him regularly.” Their friendship progressed rapidly. In October, in reply to Gambetta's offer to devolve for him, Crémieux wrote : “I hasten to accept your offer of assistance, and shall have much pleasure in watching the development of your talent, which will be a source of great glory to us in the future if you show that you are not only gifted but know how to work hard. Only, my dear colleague, you are rather late in the day. At my age,” etc. etc. Gambetta's admiration for his chief grew with their intimacy. Writing from the provinces in October 1863, he tells his parents that “Maître Crémieux is here, jolly, boyish, bubbling over with good nature and full of endless

anecdotes of old times which he can relate to perfection, of gossip of the present day which he criticizes with keen shrewdness, and of predictions for the future which he insists upon painting with rosy tints fraught with marvellous deeds, just as though he were still a man of twenty." Two years later appreciation had ripened into reverence. "Never in my life have I met with any one whose conversation is more instructive than that of Me. Crémieux and I earnestly hope that this great, kind, and generous chief will keep me in his service for many years." From this wise old lawyer with nearly half a century of active work behind him, Gambetta learnt much history and something of the art of viewing events in perspective. His gratitude was deep—so deep that it provoked him to one of his rare displays of physical violence. He gave a thrashing to a man who was rude to the old Jew.

With such friends, Gambetta was not likely to wait long for his first brief. It came to him in July 1862, when fifty-four men were charged with forming a Carbonarist secret society, and most of the leading republican advocates were retained for the defence. There seems to have been a basis of fact for the charges. The gang included a deputy or two of 1848, and a leavening of petty artisans with a belief that they had a mission to fulfil. Gambetta's client, Buette by name, was among the group that gave itself seriously to a wild conspiracy culminating in an act of political assassination. But the Government deliberately exaggerated the whole affair. At this date it still suited the Emperor to pose from time to time as the saviour of society, and the plot was certainly kept warm by *agents provocateurs*.

Gambetta's speech is of considerable biographical interest. In his later days he spoke almost without notes. It was his habit to think out the substance of his addresses, to jot down a few words and headlines to guide him,¹ and to develop his argument according to the intelligence and sympathy of his audience. This first speech, however, was written out in full in advance, and it is instructive to compare the draft with the report of the speech as actually delivered. In both versions the style is heavy and stilted, showing that the orator is not fully master of his medium. But a sincerity shines through,

¹ Two of these sketches are quoted in the sixth volume of Mme. Adam's "Souvenirs," and a third is reproduced in facsimile in Lavertujon's "Gambetta inconnu."

and there are occasional limpid passages. Quotations abound. Cicero, la Fontaine, Bossuet, and Dupaty—this last a judge who wrote pedantic platitudes in verse—are all called in aid, but the Latin is discreetly omitted in the spoken version. The draft opens with a piece of flatulent rhetoric which was actually inflicted on the Court. The advocate tells how when he first visited his client in prison, he expected to find a swollen-headed working-man, his lumpish intelligence veneered over with urban civilization, idly mouthing splendid principles which he could not truly grasp. But what was his surprise to discover in the little cell “a diamond from which I could not avert my gaze until I had, so to speak, appreciated all its facets, all the radiant clearness with which this young man of twenty-four revealed himself as an example of intelligence, self-respect, rectitude, and virtue.” This phrase, whose artificiality shocks and amuses the modern reader, appears to have suited the temperament of 1862. It was regarded as a beautiful simile for the attitude of an educated man towards an uneducated and unfortunate friend with whom he suddenly found himself in true sympathy. It may be added that Gambetta’s surprise was genuine. Buette was no low-class and ignorant agitator. Of bourgeois origin and decent upbringing, he had read Plutarch, and knew what he was talking about when he said that the heroes of his choice were Brutus and Cassius, Harmodius and Aristogeiton.

In the written draft, Gambetta had sought to clinch the effect of his simile by comparing his client to Richard Cobden, whose name was then much in men’s mouths; but the report shows that this absurd exaggeration was sensibly omitted. There follows in the original an over-elaborate sketch of Buette’s working-class environment and the constructive thought of which he was nevertheless capable. In court, the orator’s instinct asserted itself, and the laboured sentences disappear in favour of a lively dialogue. “ ‘ You are accused of membership of a secret society. Where have you been? What have you done? ’ ‘ My best plan will be to tell you the story of my life, for it has always been a life of hard work. I will tell you how I have lived, what I have read, and how I managed to get some sort of education. ’ ” The adoption of the narrative form enabled Gambetta to discuss some of the alleged facts of the case. Evidently he derived his material from the speech for the prosecution, as there is no trace of it in the preliminary draft. His statement done, the speaker proceeded to work

up his climax. It took the form of a comparison, which must have astonished the court, of the presiding magistrate to Pontius Pilate, and was fortified by quotations from St John !¹ The peroration shows the man striving to emancipate himself from the meshes of orthodox legal form. "One word more and I have done. I have used my best endeavours, but have I succeeded in convincing the court of my own conviction of my client's innocence? I trust that it may be so, but a doubt, a dreadful doubt, assails me, and I beg of you to preserve me from the pangs of remorse. If your justice strikes down a man of so healthy an outlook, so noble a heart, so honourable a career, I shall have to beat my breast and proclaim the fault mine alone."

Buette got three months. Gambetta was not mistaken in attributing no common qualities to his client. In later life he made a fortune as a contractor, and became one of his advocate's warmest supporters, though always a little sore that the statesman's reputation was not founded on his own case.²

Better speeches than Gambetta's defence have been delivered by men who have not afterwards acquired European celebrity. It may be doubted whether Gambetta would ever have become a great advocate. Subtlety of mind and readiness of argument were his, but he lacked the perseverance to master his cases in detail. Work, chiefly political, came to him during the next six years, but it came to him because he was a clever man, a true patriot, and a thoroughly good fellow, who was trying to make a living at the bar. A story, probably apocryphal, makes Thiers say to Gambetta, "You have the gift of words and an instinct for politics. Do not let your judgment be perverted by private litigation at all, or at any rate confine yourself to political cases. They will throw up your qualities."

This was the principle on which Gambetta himself acted. After 1870 he never appeared in court except once to defend his friend Challemel Lacour. In his younger days he pleaded for the sake of a living. Reputations are not made by bread and butter work, and accordingly Gambetta had to wait another

¹ As the magistrate's name was Salmon, a reference to the Book of Kings might have been more appropriate.

² After Gambetta's death Buette lost his money, emigrated to Brazil, took the wrong side in an insurrection, and was captured and shot. Because he had remained a French subject the Brazilian Government was forced to pay 300,000 francs compensation to his family.

six years before he emerged from the crowd.¹ When his time came, a forensic speech lifted him at a bound into European notoriety, and made him the hero of young France. But the speech was a great political call to arms, delivered to a court of law only because it could have been spoken nowhere else.

¹ It is often stated that Gambetta was the barrister who shouted " Hurrah for Poland " at the Tsar during his visit to the Paris law courts in 1867. But the doubt which attaches to the story proves that Gambetta was still comparatively an unknown man.

IV

L'AFFAIRE BAUDIN

AS the year 1851 drew towards its close, all France looked forward to the future with growing uneasiness. A revolution was apprehended in the following May, when the powers of both the Prince-President and the Assembly would lapse simultaneously. In the autumn there were rumours of an impending *coup d'état*, but the Assembly sat undisturbed throughout November, and the fears died down. Meanwhile Napoleon matured his plans in such profound secrecy that until an hour or so of their execution only five of his chosen friends were fully initiated. His selected moment was 2 December—the anniversary of his uncle's coronation, and of Austerlitz. The previous evening the Prince-President held his usual Monday reception at the Elysée. Nothing in his face or gesture indicated what was toward. The crowd thinned out until only the conspirators were left. In the small hours the national printing office was seized and the text of the prepared proclamations distributed to the staff. Next morning Paris woke up to find that the Assembly Hall was held by troops, and that sixteen prominent deputies, including its most distinguished military members and the leading monarchists and democrats, had been arrested overnight. The police had also laid hands on a few dozen citizens. Everywhere were placards announcing that the Assembly was dissolved, that universal suffrage had been restored, and that the Prince-President would immediately appeal to the country to confirm his acts. As the day wore on the monarchist wing of the Assembly met, to the number of 220, in the Mayoral building of the 10th arrondissement. On the motion of Berryer it had unanimously decreed the President's deposition before troops appeared and marched its members off to prison. A little group of republicans had also met privately, and had resolved to attempt to rouse the workmen next day. On the following

morning a pitiful barricade, composed of an overturned omnibus and a couple of carriages, was thrown up in the Faubourg St Antoine. Its defenders had twenty-two guns, all but three of which had been seized from a neighbouring police post. Eight deputies were on the barricade when the troops appeared. As they approached, one of the deputies, a doctor named Baudin, sought to rouse the bystanders from their apathy. One of them replied that he had no wish to die in helping a member of the Assembly to keep his daily pay of 25 francs. "Wait a little," replied Baudin prophetically, "you shall see how a man can die for 25 francs."

Seven deputies, all wearing their official scarves, advanced to reason with the soldiers. Baudin stood on the barricade, the text of the constitution in his hand, ready to quote the *ipsissima verba* of the military duty it imposed. A short parley took place. Then the troops moved forward to get between the seven and their barricade. There was some hustling, and a republican, misinterpreting the situation, fired and hit a soldier. The troops replied with a volley. Baudin, still quoting, fell with three bullets in his skull; a workman beside him was wounded.

Next day Paris found itself under martial law, and all well disposed citizens were advised to keep within doors. The conspirators, who wished to make play with the spectre of a Red Terror, held their hand throughout the morning, and allowed the disorderly elements to concentrate in the centre of the city where they threw up barricades. In the afternoon the streets were pitilessly cleared by the military. The number of the killed was officially given as 191, but was probably underestimated. By 5 December Paris was itself again.

In the provinces the opposition threatened to be more serious, but was very firmly dealt with. A state of siege was proclaimed in thirty-two departments, and the total number of arrests approximated to 100,000. In most cases release followed hard on arrest. But some 25,000 persons were brought before special tribunals. Nearly half were acquitted, but close on 10,000 were sent to Algeria, 1000 or so more were interned or exiled, and a few score really dangerous men were deported to Cayenne.

The *coup d'état* profoundly shocked enlightened opinion. Palmerston, indeed, approved of the step which he thought had been forced upon the Prince-President by the danger of an

Orleanist rising ; and so shrewd an observer as Walter Bagehot wrote from Paris a series of rather mocking letters in which he justified Napoleon's claim to have given security to France. But the straightforward liberal thought of the day would have none of these niceties. Conduct was either right or wrong, and the conduct of the Prince-President in destroying the constitution, which he had sworn on oath to maintain, was conspicuously wrong. The tone of contemptuous sarcasm which runs through Kinglake's account of the episode fairly represents the general opinion of the time. In France itself the leaders of thought were openly scandalized, and, in particular, Napoleon made an implacable enemy of Victor Hugo, who wielded the most powerful pen not only in France but in Europe. His denunciations of the "crime" were read widely in the outside world and surreptitiously on French soil. But the lapse of half a generation brings forgetfulness of many things, particularly when a Government is at pains to provide an abundance of fresh sensations ; and by the middle of the 'sixties the average Frenchman, with nothing but official apologetics to guide him, had only a dim notion of the precise fashion in which the now fly-blown Empire had first set itself up on its pedestal of universal suffrage.

By this time Napoleon was feeling his way towards the liberalism of his last phase. The censorship was relaxed, and in 1866 Eugene Ténot, editor of the "*Siècle*," published a book on the behaviour of the departments in December 1851. It was a documented defence of the French peasantry against the official charge that they had attempted a jacquerie. Its success induced the author to bring out a companion volume on events in Paris, and this was published in 1868. There is no need to disturb the dust which has now settled on M. Ténot's pages. His book is a detailed and conscientious compilation—so conscientious that it imparts an atmosphere of dullness to one of the most dramatic episodes in modern history. But it made a sensation in its day. It gave the facts, the full facts for which Frenchmen of the 'sixties were hungry, and it gave them from a strongly republican point of view. Gambetta was quick to see that it provided him with material for overwhelming the tottering Government with ridicule and indignation. His chance soon came, and he took it.

"A newspaper states that on 2 November, All Souls' Day, the cemeteries of Paris will be closed to the public. Our con-

temporary is clearly mistaken. No authority can prevent a people from honouring itself by honouring the memory of men who have bequeathed it noble examples—such men as Godefroy Cavaignac, who have devoted their lives to struggles for liberty, such men as Baudin who have met martyrdom in vindication of the law.” This rhetorical little paragraph was published on 29 October in the “*Réveil*,” a most disloyal weekly, and attracted the attention of the police. On All Souls’ Day a group of twenty or thirty men, writers for the paper and their friends, went to Montmartre cemetery, laid wreaths on Cavaignac’s tomb, and said a few words. Search was then made for Baudin’s grave, long neglected and forgotten ; it was indeed at first supposed that his body had been taken to the provinces for burial. The Government doubtless wished for an excuse to arrest these troublesome republicans, and there may be truth in Gambetta’s insinuation that the first impulse to find the grave came from police agents. But there was no disorder, and nothing more would have been heard of the episode had not the “*Réveil*” and two other obscure papers opened a subscription for the erection of a monument to the martyred deputy. The authorities promptly arrested the editors and charged them with attempting to disturb the public peace, and to bring the Government into hatred and contempt. The great independent dailies at once opened their columns to the subscription. Money flowed in, and the dying Berryer’s last public act was to send a donation.

The case, which had by now created intense public excitement, was taken on 14 November. Eight defendants, all newspaper men, were charged in all, and Crémieux, Laurier, Favre, and Arago were among the counsel retained. Gambetta’s client was Charles Louis Delescluze.

Delescluze was a pig-headed jacobin, incapable as any Bourbon of learning or forgetting anything. A true revolutionary born half a century after his time, he was bound to make himself a nuisance to any government that stood for order and tranquillity. He first emerged in 1830, but was too much even for Louis Philippe’s tolerant administration, and spent some years in exile at Brussels. 1848 saw him back in Paris, and he became a commissioner of the republic in Normandy. But he was tried before the year was out, was again exiled, this time to London, and after another return to France, was deported, in 1853, to Cayenne. Amnestied in 1859,

he agitated obscurely for some years, and founded the "Réveil" on 11 May, 1867, the very day that the new Press law made it possible for a paper to be started without a licence.

There was, of course, no real sympathy between Gambetta and this doctrinaire extremist, and his reputation suffered in after years from his brief association with one whose name had then taken rank among the most sinister in French history.

Delescluze served a few months' imprisonment for the Baudin affair, and then betook himself to Belgium. He returned to Paris after the outbreak of war, and was under preventive arrest during the siege, a fact which accounts for his election to the National Assembly. He resigned as soon as the preliminaries of peace were voted, and gave his last energies—for he was dying and knew it—to the elaboration of the Commune. As mayor of the XIXth arrondissement, he served on all the committees whose successive appointment eliminated the moderates, and in the last terrible May days was civilian delegate to the Commune's War Office. In that capacity he inspired the hideous programme of destruction to which his dying frenzy prompted him. When the end was very near, when central Paris was a furnace and the Versailles troops had entered the fortifications, the doomed fanatic put on top-hat and frock-coat, bound his sash of office about his waist, and in full dress went out to meet death in the way. Up the deserted Boulevard Voltaire he tottered, a tragi-comic figure of horror, until the bullets found him.

But Gambetta cannot be blamed if, in 1868, he saw in Delescluze nothing more than an embittered old republican who would think a term of imprisonment a cheap price to pay for a really effective demonstration against the Government—such a demonstration as his advocate was burning to make. The two men were not complete strangers. Some time previously the "Revue de Paris" had attacked political deportees and had spoken of them as convicts. Delescluze wrote a letter of protest, which the editor of the "Revue" refused to publish. The aggrieved "convict" brought an action, and Gambetta was counsel for the paper. This did not distress Delescluze, who was, however, inclined to be suspicious of Gambetta, when his name was first brought forward, because of his alleged visit in Laurier's company to the Duc d'Aumale in England. But his friends vouched for his sturdy republicanism, Gambetta himself made it clear that he would

not mince his words, and the bargain was struck and kept. The orator did not spare himself. M. Jules Claretie remembers his appearance at the end of his speech, his long hair all awry, his dress in disorder, with unbuttoned jacket and vanished tie. But, as Gambetta himself put it, he had drowned the public prosecutor. He had said exactly what he meant to say, and, what was more, knew that every word of his speech would be reported. It proved a little masterpiece of passionate invective, so short that the newspapers had ample space for it—the style limpid and rushing, the coherent argument mounting to a climax of magnificent audacity. A calmly provocative opening ensured the orator's subsequent effects. He declared that he would be sober in his language. When the court, as was natural, presently reminded him of his promise, he retorted that his feelings overcame him, and hurried on to develop the argument which no one dared again to interrupt.

The prosecution had declared that the case touched fundamental principles of law and government. Gambetta fully agreed. When the appeal was heard, he argued the facts at length, and dealt with the judgment of the court below clause by clause with so much effect that, though the sentence of six months' imprisonment was maintained, the fine was reduced from 2000 francs to 50. At the preliminary hearing, however, the facts were soon brushed aside. Some men had assembled round a tomb, and were alleged to have delivered speeches of unreported substance. Such a case was nothing; the personality of his client was everything. A judiciously summary sketch of Delescluze's career showed that it had reached its climax in his work in 1848—work the memory of which he now wished to revive. His wish was described as treason. Why? Because of the catastrophe by which '48 was overwhelmed. What happened, asked Gambetta, on 2 December, 1851? There were then gathered about a pretender men without capacity or conscience, without position or place, such men as have always outraged law. But they saved society! No, when society is in danger the best men of the State rally to its defence. The speaker rolled off his tongue the great names of constitutional France. On that December morning their bearers were all in prison, in exile, or in flight. The objection that this theory of the salvation of society had been confirmed by the votes of the nation was then raised and answered by the retort that confirmation had been obtained through

trickery. Paris had been told that the provinces were "loyal," the provinces that Paris supported the usurper. And if five million votes had indeed justified 2 December, "why forbid discussion now? Because judgment was daily being passed, because in Paris, London, Berlin, New York, the *coup d'état* was universally condemned by the conscience of mankind." These were sentiments which no one had dared publicly to utter in France for about eighteen years, and a last deadly thrust drove their meaning home. "Other French Governments had celebrated the anniversary of their foundation, but there were two dates which found no place in any official calendar, the 2nd December and the 18th Brumaire! We will make the celebration ours," concluded the orator. "Every year we will commemorate our dead until France, become her own mistress again, imposes on you the duty of national expiation in the name of liberty, equality, and fraternity."

"But what," the Empress is reported to have asked in the Tuileries that evening, "what have we done to this young man to make him hate us so?"

V

FROM EMPIRE TO REPUBLIC

THE speech made Gambetta's political fortune. It was admirably timed. The elections would take place six months hence, and the campaign was already beginning. The Empire was losing ground daily. The opposition of five, with which Gambetta consorted when he first interested himself in politics, had been increased to thirty-five after the elections of 1863. But the rot had spread fast since then. The towns were openly hostile; the country districts were beginning to waver; and convinced Bonapartists were everywhere finding it advisable to disclaim the official patronage which ten years before they would have welcomed as ensuring their success at the polls. An urban candidature clearly awaited the young man who had just trumpeted out his defiance of the moribund régime, and both Paris and Marseilles paid him the compliment of offering him seats. Gambetta accepted both invitations, while making it clear that in the event of a double success, he would sit for Marseilles. His natural sympathies as a Southerner inspired his choice. It was justified by the fact that the extreme unrest prevalent among the Paris working folk compelled him to adopt a very advanced programme, including separation of Church and State, the election of administrative functionaries, and the abolition of the standing army; and Gambetta's genius was of too constructive a turn to be passionate for such impracticable aspirations. But his Paris campaign first established that intimate contact with the working-classes of Belleville which was to be his pride for the rest of his life. His candidature was successful in both places. At Paris he scored an immediate and overwhelming triumph over Carnot, son of the organizer of victory, and father of the future President. At Marseilles he had an even more redoubtable opponent. Thiers, the leader of the moderate anti-imperialists, claimed the succession to Berryer's seat.

But Gambetta headed the poll on the first ballot, and, Thiers being eliminated, had no further difficulty in routing the official nominee, de Lesseps.¹

The elections returned a republican opposition ninety strong, but about half its members were to rally to the moderate left. This "third" party, the constitutional imperialists, now became the dominant force in the state. When the Legislative Body assembled in June, the moderates, to the number of 116, at once met and passed a resolution amounting to a demand for a ministry responsible to Parliament. The Emperor accepted the inevitable, and adjourned the House, first till November and then till January, while he worked out his scheme for somehow reconciling his own autocracy with the sovereignty of an elected chamber. The instrument with which he hoped to square the political circle was Emile Ollivier. Originally one of the five, Ollivier had long shown signs of rallying to the Empire, and his conversion was now complete. At the turn of the year he faced Parliament with his ministry. He was to hold office for eight months, and was then to spend more than forty years in compiling his defence of his acts and policies. Death took him when he had almost completed his huge task of recording, in fullest detail, the decline and fall of the Second Empire.

The long adjournment was acceptable enough to Gambetta on personal grounds. He had hoped to recuperate in his parents' new home, for his father now retired from business and settled in a little house between Nice and Villefranche. It lay in the strip of Italy which had lately become French, and therefore made an appropriate home for the gallicized Italian. Here Gambetta was to spend his annual holiday in later years, but in 1869 he stood in need of more than a mere rest. His health had completely given way under the stress of his double election campaign, and the doctors recommended Ems. His arrival at the German spa caused some local interest. The King of Prussia, who was drinking the waters, as he was to be drinking them, more sensationally, a year later, had heard of the young firebrand and made cautious inquiries about his health. A Coblenz newspaper discovered, much to Gambetta's amusement, that his hostility to the Emperor really sprang from a

¹ The figures were: Paris, Gambetta, 21,734; Carnot, 9142. Marseilles, 1st ballot, Gambetta, 8663; Lesseps, 4535; Thiers, 3582; Barthélèmy, 3075. 2nd ballot, Gambetta, 12,868; Lesseps, 5066.

family quarrel, the two being related through Gambetta's great-grandmother. On the other hand Gambetta displayed no corresponding interest in the Germans, who were so soon to become his main preoccupation. He notes, indeed, the loss or robbery, soon after his arrival, of his purse containing 800 francs, and observes that the charges would intimidate a rich banker. But for most of his stay he was struggling with the depression consequent on his illness. His breathing was badly affected. It seemed doubtful whether he would ever speak again, and, in fact, his voice did not fully recover its former richness. "I wish with all my heart to get well; for if my health were to continue in its present condition, I would much rather die, for I should be obliged to give up my political career and to drag out a miserable existence as an invalid in some out of the way corner of the world." (To his father, 15 July, 1869.) But he was an intractable patient. As he admitted in another letter home, "it is always with the greatest difficulty that I can bring myself to look after my health, physical or mental." He stilled in the relaxing valley, and in August betook himself to Montreux, where the mountain scenery was much more to his taste. His spirits rose, his breathing improved, but his digestion continued to give trouble.

Though resolved to resign his seat if his health were permanently impaired, he was all the while athirst for the political fray. Regarding it as impossible for the moribund Empire to be saved by the incompetent friends still left it, he looked forward to another dissolution which would lead to the return of a republican majority. With this hope he laboured at consolidating the opposition. The luck was with him in that he had lately obtained access to the most influential republican circle in Paris. In the autumn which made Gambetta famous the Adams had opened the *salon* which was soon to become so celebrated. He was a banker, she a writer, both were republicans who felt that the Empire cut them off from all healthy political activity. But it would be something if they could make their house in the Boulevard Poissonière the centre at which all the rising young men of the party could gather to exchange ideas and lay plans in the confidence that would come of complete security from the attention of the police. This was the origin of the weekly dinner which was such a feature of Paris political life for the next ten years. The *salon* had just begun to make headway when Adam, who had met Gambetta

elsewhere, mentioned his name to his wife. He was doubtful whether Madame Adam could invite him owing to his shocking accent and still more shocking manners. On the other hand he was undoubtedly a man—noisy, vulgar, overbearing, but a second Danton. Intrigued by her husband's report, Madame Adam made further inquiries and, on learning from a friend that the young provincial was impossible, boldly sent him a card for her next dinner. Gambetta came, appallingly dressed. To keep him in countenance before the servants Madame Adam altered her table arrangements and, herself giving her guest her arm, placed him on her right. Thus on his first visit Gambetta assumed the seat which he soon took as a matter of course, and his whispered thanks to his considerate hostess laid the foundations of a friendship of the utmost political importance. Madame Adam was a brilliant and delightful woman whom Paris society was glad to know. It was no small thing that Gambetta stood exceptionally high in her regard and that his schemes were first produced and discussed at her table. Thanks to her memoirs the world can now listen to the talk. Her influence in maintaining republican unity was enormous. When the party fell to pieces after its triumph in 1877, Madame Adam, now a widow, gave up her political *salon* and founded her magazine, the "Nouvelle Revue," which henceforth held her chief attention. Her memoirs end with the publication of its first number in the autumn of 1879. But for more than ten years they give a vivid and fascinating picture of Gambetta in all his moods, and the progress of his thought from 1868 onwards is luminously though not uncritically traced in her pages.

Gambetta's views on the policy now to be pursued by the left were set out in an open letter to his constituents, and were even more frankly stated in a letter to Laurier. "It is time to force the left to form itself into a Government according to the wishes of the public. . . . So far we have been unable to seize and hold the helm of public opinion. . . . The country, well aware that the present Government is at its last gasp, is looking for a guide and finds nothing. The 'third party' of the left and left centre seems equally unfit to command and to obey. This state of anarchy must cease." (1 September, 1869.) In this temper he took his seat when the House met at the beginning of January and at once launched his first attack.

The ground was well chosen. During the elections two

soldiers, natives of Paris and enrolled in a regiment garrisoning the capital, had attended a meeting in support of the republican candidate for the constituency in which their homes lay. They were arrested, reprimanded, and sent to Algeria. When the fact became known the "Rappel" opened a fund to purchase their discharge. Victor Hugo sent a subscription from the Channel Islands; his son Charles supported the appeal in some violent articles. The Government prosecuted Gambetta, being retained for the defence, became interested in the affair. Letters addressed to the soldiers on the subject of their discharge had not reached them, and on the first day of the session Gambetta interpellated the War Minister, Marshal Leboeuf. Where were the two soldiers, and would the War Office undertake that their correspondence should be delivered? The Marshal made an effective but truculent reply. It was bad for soldiers to attend public meetings, especially meetings at which evil political communications might corrupt their good military manners. These two men had refused to express regret for their breach of discipline, and were therefore sent to Algeria. They had since been joined by other soldiers who had collected money from their comrades for the "Rappel's" fund. The minister refused to state where the disobedient couple were stationed and made no reference to their correspondence. Gambetta rose at once to denounce the Government as repressive and to protest against this use of brute force against free citizens. His denunciation brought up Ollivier with a formal statement that he was working for a liberal system, but stood for order, security, and social peace. In this principle of policy, he continued in language which was at once recognized as an overture, there was nothing to which the left could take objection. Gambetta was instantly on his feet again and flung the olive branch in the Premier's face. Joining issue on the point of principle, he announced that he would be satisfied with nothing short of a republic. "The time will come," he declared, "and perhaps is already not far off, when without breach of the peace, without recourse to the sword, without subversion of discipline, the force of circumstances will inevitably bring about another order of things. What are you but a bridge between the Republic of 1848 and the Republic which is to be—a bridge which we are now crossing."

The simile told, and its author became the acknowledged leader of the Irreconcilables. He followed up his advantage,

and on 18 January his ridicule of Ollivier led to a turbulent parliamentary scene. Gambetta taunted the Premier with the coincidence between his advancement and the change in his opinions. The harassed minister replied with heavy platitudes and was repeatedly interrupted by his assailant. Losing patience, Ollivier begged him to listen. "I am listening," was the impudent retort. "How could I interrupt if I were not?" The closure ended the disorder.

In April Gambetta delivered the speech which established his parliamentary reputation. The new constitution was to be submitted to plebiscite, and the right taunted the democratic leader with his reluctance to accept an appeal to the nation. Gambetta replied to the taunts in a speech which expounded his whole political philosophy, gave the measure of his statesmanship, and showed that he was entirely at home in the region of first principles. It was a long speech, and his voice failed him midway. A Bonapartist, with evident sincerity, called on him to speak up; it was not only the left which was interested in his views. Despite his physical difficulties, the orator held the House. A cup of coffee was brought to him to refresh his throat. A gesture knocked it over and spilled the contents on the reporters' heads. The incident, which would have ruined any ordinary speech, was hardly noticed.

In a glowing passage, Gambetta reasserted his unchanged belief in the wisdom of the people. But this plebiscite was a hollow sham. It was alleged that it would establish the parliamentary system. On the contrary it would wreck it, for parliamentary sovereignty and popular sovereignty could not go together. Still less was the sovereignty of the people compatible with an irresponsible monarchy. Against this Rousseau was cast in his teeth, Rousseau who had said that the people could not recall a sovereignty once confessed. Well, Rousseau was wrong. He had been led into error by his wish to find some authority which would appear an effective counterpoise to the principle of Divine Right which he was attacking. The Roman people had preceded Rousseau in his mistake, and by their votes had created an unmitigated despotism. It was such an exposition as a French audience loves—a criticism of authority by means of a judicious citation of facts. The conclusion thus elaborately argued was that the whole imperial scheme was a monstrous paradox, the new constitution being in fact an outrage on the very popular sovereignty which was

invoked to sanction it. The speech thrilled the rising generation of republicans. In their enthusiasm, the senior students of the *lycées* invited Gambetta to a banquet at which he launched a characteristic appeal to the youth of France. He reminded them that their mature manhood would celebrate the centenary of 1789. The chronology showed that the heroic age of republicanism was past, and that the business of the coming Republic would be to complete the work of social justice.

But time was not to be given to Gambetta to develop the programme contained in this pregnant thought. His health was again troubling him and he took a short holiday in the neighbourhood of the Belgian frontier, travelling under his mother's maiden name of Messabie in order to escape attention. It was to be his last rest before he flung himself into the supreme effort of his life.

As the world knows, the storm broke suddenly. On the evening of 15 July, the House, excited by the events of that tempestuous day, met to take its fateful decision. Its temper was hot for war, and it gave scant heed to Gambetta's warning. If war came, he urged with prescient wisdom, it would devote the rest of the century to rivalry between Frenchmen and Germans for preponderance in Europe. Such a war would make a violent break with France's former policy of giving scope to all nations. Therefore France owed it to the world to prove that she had indeed been provoked by gross insult and was drawing the sword in lawful resistance to wrong put upon her. But where was this proof? asked Gambetta in language which posterity must applaud. Never mind what Bismarck had said in his dispatch to the cabinets of Europe—or was it only to the cabinets of Southern Germany? The best judge of an insult was its victim. Did Count Benedetti's own report convey any hint that he thought himself insulted? The question pointed to the clue to the whole fraud of Bismarck's diplomacy. But the House was in no mood to wait for an answer. Outside his own party Gambetta found no supporter save Thiers. As was always the case when fundamental issues were at stake, the two overcame their differences of temperament and found agreement. Thiers begged for twenty-four hours' delay; his most sound plea was disregarded.

The decision once taken, Gambetta cast party politics behind him and thought only of his country. His patriotic lead was followed by his party, and Glais-Bizoin was the only republican

who finally opposed the credits voted that night. Throughout the next six weeks Gambetta did all in his power to promote the unity of France and to ensure the more energetic prosecution of the war. He begged the Government to trust the country and pleaded for an amnesty to seventy-two persons charged with conspiracy during the plebiscite. Above all things he urged Ministers to arm every man. Petitions for arms poured in from all parts of France, and were presented by members of the left; but it was to Gambetta that the people of Paris turned to convey their requests. Fear of misrepresentation did not deter him from exposing the incompetence and bad faith of ministers. He read from the tribune extracts from the provincial press which acquainted Paris with the full extent of the German advance—a subject on which the War Office preserved a cowardly and dishonourable silence. By such means Gambetta hoped to spur the timorous Chamber into asserting itself. After Worth and Spicheren he joined with Favre in urging it to control the war through its own committees, and bade it choose between the safety of the country and the safety of the dynasty. There was indeed still time for choice. This was 10 August, and Macmahon's army was yet safe at Chalons. It might have been withdrawn for the defence of Paris. Dynastic considerations directed its march to relieve Metz and headed it into the trap at Sedan. In the last days of August Gambetta's sense of the imminence of the danger made him propose that the recruiting and equipment of the Paris National Guard should be handed over to Trochu. But the House would not act. In vain Gambetta denounced the members of the majority as patriotic but blind. In vain he proclaimed his conviction that France was plunging towards the abyss. In another week the plunge was taken.

The terrible news became known in Paris in the early hours of 3 September, but it was not until the afternoon that the Empress received her husband's telegram announcing his capitulation. Gambetta's constitutional sense did not desert him in the hour of disaster. He realized that if the new Government was to command the full regard of all France it must issue from the Legislative Body and not from the Paris mob. In this spirit he harangued the crowd which had gathered in the Place de la Concorde with intent to sweep away the House which now represented all that was left of constituted authority. His efforts succeeded and a sitting was held

at one in the morning to hear the Premier, Count Palikao, report the facts. Discussion was adjourned until midday, when Favre and Thiers tabled motions empowering the House to nominate a Government of National Defence.¹ Palikao countered with a hopeless project for a regency. The House referred all three proposals to a Committee and adjourned for two hours. Meanwhile the crowd gradually pushed back the National Guard who were holding the approaches to the Palais Bourbon, surged into the building, crowded the lobbies and filled the public galleries of the Chamber. With tact and courage Gambetta appealed for order, that a House might be formed and transact the necessary business. The President took the chair, but the crowd in the lobbies made it impossible for any deputies save those of the left to reach their places. Twice more Gambetta strove to make a sitting possible. But there was confusion without, and the President finally left the chair. The tumult grew. At last Gambetta, resolved to give some semblance of form to an irregular proceeding, ascended the tribune and read a formula of deposition:—"Considering that France is in peril; considering that the representatives of the nation have been given time to declare the dynasty deposed; considering that we are and form a constitutional authority issuing from the popular vote: we declare that Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte and his house have ceased to reign over France henceforward for ever." There were cheers for the Republic, for Gambetta and Favre. Realizing that this Republic could only be the creation of Paris, Gambetta proposed to proclaim it from the Hotel de Ville. The public in the galleries shouted approval and Gambetta left the Palais-Bourbon, Favre beside him and the crowd streaming behind. The floor of the Chamber gradually emptied, but the public remained in the galleries waiting the end and willing meanwhile to dispute good-humouredly with a plucky Bonapartist deputy who took his seat and protested his continued right to legislate.

The leading republicans met at the Hotel de Ville to form a provisional Government. There was some discussion. Picard put in a claim for the Ministry of the Interior and its administrative control of France. But his long friendship with Ollivier made him suspect. Gambetta, his heart sick at the thought of what might happen at Metz, pleaded for the inclusion

¹ Favre's resolution declared the Emperor deposed; Thiers tactfully left everything to the decision of a future Constituent Assembly.

of Bazaine, but could not overcome Trochu's objections. It was seven o'clock when Glais-Bizoin returned to the Chamber with news of what had been done. He mounted the tribune, and, with a lamp on either side of him to reveal his identity, told the public in the still crowded galleries that the Republic had been proclaimed and the Legislative Body dissolved by the provisional Government at the Hotel de Ville.

In this Government Gambetta was nominated Minister of the Interior.

PART II—THE WAR

VI

THE GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENCE

THE French, who are a vivacious and imaginative people, have drawn from Gambetta's activities between Sedan and the armistice material for two Gambettist legends. According to the one the history of France during these five months is an appanage of Gambetta's biography, and the record of the Third Republic its corollary. We are to picture the hero as a Joan of Arc with up-to-date ideas, who found a France not only beaten but ashamed, who plucked honour out of disaster, who drew from the chaotic ruin of a corrupt administration the rough material for a new system and a new hope. The other legend traces a very different picture. It represents Gambetta as a demagogue greedy of power, reckless in its use, prepared to shed the blood of Frenchmen for ever and to inflict irreparable material loss on his country if only he might continue to exercise his dictatorship. To such lengths can party spirit lead logically-minded publicists. A sound estimate is made all the more difficult by the fact that almost all the evidence is biassed. After everything was over, a parliamentary inquiry was held into the Government of National Defence, and there, if anywhere, we should expect to find a calm appraisal of facts. But in all European history there is nothing more venomous than French party spirit, and this Commission was content to degenerate into a party manœuvre. Little value attaches to its investigations, for the questions of its most active members reveal a desire to score off the "dictator" rather than to search for truth.¹ Some allowance must be

¹ But Gambetta left no autobiographical papers, and during these five months was too busy to make speeches. His evidence-in-chief before this Commission is thus the only first-hand material available for his policy and conduct during his term of office. It has therefore been translated in full in Appendix I.

made for the circumstances in which the inquiry was held. The French nation had been beaten by the German nation, and the struggle had been so prolonged that the truth could not be hid. Nevertheless French pride demanded a scapegoat. Much blame, not a little of it deserved, was heaped upon Napoleon III; and the contemptible creature Bazaine received his reward of execration. But monarchists of all shades of opinion still required a victim, and Gambetta was obviously their man. There was published in Paris, while the Commission was sitting, a little book on the dictatorship of Gambetta by Monsieur H. R. Blandeau. Even in French literature, which is rich enough in political invective, this book is conspicuous for its shocking brutality. Composed entirely of fantastic and disgusting accusations of incompetence, falsehood, tyranny, peculation, and cowardice, it is eloquent of the atmosphere in which the Commission deliberated.¹ In that atmosphere the two legends were fostered. In that atmosphere too—and this is a point to be remembered later on—Gambetta had to determine his future line of political conduct. But amid all the controversy that raged about him, friends and enemies were at least agreed on this—that during his five months of almost untrammelled authority, he cared nothing for contemporary criticism. Whatever may be thought of the work he set himself to perform, at least he gave himself heart and soul to its performance. His position and the use he made of it were both unique; and neither can be appreciated without reference to the source of his power and to the spirit which determined its nature.

The new Government was born of the Paris mob, and betrayed its origin by including every Paris deputy except Thiers. Paris, they say, is France, and at most times of crisis in French history the provinces have been content to follow the lead of the capital. But Paris was not France in mid-summer 1870. The people of Paris had condemned the Empire, and the core of the republican opposition had been made up of Paris deputies. In the provinces, however, Napoleon's Government, while no longer popular, was at least not abhorrent in principle. The recent plebiscite had proved as much,

¹ Reference may also be made to "*Les Origines de la troisième République*," by P. A. Callet. M. Callet was a member of the Commission of Inquiry, and his book is his draft report, which even his colleagues found a degree too strong.

though embittered opponents did not hesitate to declare that the Emperor had made his majority by stuffing the ballot-boxes. Relentless party feeling had blinded them to the good qualities of the imperial system. The Empire gave the steady, easy-going provincials what they wanted. They had the comfortable feeling that France was the chief power in Europe, but they saw nothing of the corruption of the court. They had strong prefects who kept the departments quiet and in good odour with the Ministry of the Interior, but they knew nothing of the intrigues through which their prefects had been appointed. Their local needs were adequately met, and they were untroubled by the confusion in the national finances. The new Government was thus under some necessity of concealing its true character. To its creators and to most of its members it represented a successful republican revolution deserving of support because it had overturned the dynasty. To Frenchmen of the provinces it submitted itself as a group of men prepared to exercise the power entrusted to them in the interests of national defence, and having no aim except to rid French soil of the invader. Thus it stood at once for the nation and for the party, for the patriotism of all Frenchmen and for the politics of French republicans; and the more it progressed with the work immediately before it, the more would it be compelled to proclaim its ultimate intentions. It was caught in a logical circle. Its business was to conclude peace on satisfactory terms. But with the Empress intriguing from England and Bazaine intriguing from Metz, the Germans could not be expected to sign a treaty with the self-constituted body which had no more sanction than the cheers of Paris could give. There must be an election, and the Government could not meet the new Assembly without taking up a definite attitude towards the domestic question. All through the autumn and winter the question of the election harrassed the Ministry almost as much as the war itself, and the mystery that hung about the political intentions of the Government continued to embarrass its agents to the end.

If its purpose was obscure so was its function. Was it to redeem France or to save Paris? At first the two objects coincided. Any military movement in the provinces would check the enemy in his march on the capital. But long before the siege closed in, the more far-sighted spirits had realized that there was a France outside Paris and that this France

might turn the fortune of war though Paris were left to shift for herself, perhaps though Paris were forced to surrender.

Gambetta was himself a republican and Paris was the capital of his Republic, but to his mind the times were too serious for any thought of political principle or local pride. The war was the sole issue. Such had been his view ever since 15 July, and he maintained it unwaveringly to the end. His circulars, issued broadcast through France on his assumption of office, spoke only of the peril encompassing the country, and his shining patriotism brought a notable response. Men so different as Edgar Quinet and Guizot, as Victor Hugo and the Comte de Chambord, rallied for the moment to the Government of National Defence, and it is to the eternal credit of Gambetta that in this hour of agony he compelled Frenchmen to remember only that they were Frenchmen. To have proclaimed that high ideal in Paris after the September revolution when old hatreds were unchained and everybody was passionately talking party politics, is in itself a claim on the admiration of posterity. Gambetta himself wrote no memoirs, but to estimate the loftiness of his aims and the disinterestedness of his conduct at their true value it is enough to contrast his official instructions with the vindictive tone of so good a patriot as Jules Favre in his narrative of the Government of National Defence and his own part therein.

It was a corollary of his general attitude that Gambetta should view the military situation in its true perspective. In his opinion, as he told the Commission of Inquiry later on, the seat of Government should at once have been transferred to Tours and the organization of national resistance immediately taken in hand. In this he was overruled, more perhaps by the habit of the French mind than by the special convictions of his colleagues. With all their imagination the French people did not realize that there was a France apart from Paris until Paris had been actually cut off. Then it was that Gambetta left for Tours, but a month's precious time had been lost, and Gambetta's own clearness of perception affected. His armies were put in motion before they were drilled, in order that Paris might be saved—put in motion, too, before there was need, for the resistance of Paris was prolonged beyond anticipation. Even so he never regarded himself as a mere delegate of the Paris Government. Since the interruption of communications had made unitary administration impossible, the

Government had divided itself, and he was one of the parts. Favre's action in concluding an armistice on behalf of all France he persistently regarded as an intolerable intrusion upon his own functions. He was himself prepared to ignore Paris and fight on, and he resigned sooner than concede the point. In all this his countrymen held him to be wrong. To them Paris was France. In Paris the National Defence began, and with the fall of Paris it ended. That the provincial campaign was ever planned and attempted is due to Gambetta's noble error. France owes him her thanks for it.

It was, then, no mere chance that sent Gambetta to Tours, no mere pressure of circumstances that forced on him the post of a dictator. The work he did was his to do from the first. His glowing patriotism, pure from all dross of party feeling, had secured his appointment to the Ministry of the Interior. But as the enemy closed on the capital what was a Minister of the Interior to do? The siege began on 19 September; on the 27th the Prussians cut the cable, submerged in the bed of the Seine, by which regular communication was maintained with Rouen and the outside world. From that time the Minister of the Interior could not move without encroaching on the prerogatives of Arago the Mayor of Paris, of Ferry the Prefect of the Seine, or of Trochu the military Governor and head of the administration; and meanwhile the departmental organization of France, bereft of the familiar control of headquarters, was falling to pieces. Gambetta's hour was come.

VII

ADMINISTRATIVE DIFFICULTIES—THE TOURS DELEGATION

THE proclamations, circulars and despatches issued by Gambetta from Paris and Tours are his justification to posterity. Happily they have been collected and edited with loving care by M. Reinach, whose impartial and scholarly mind is never perverted by misplaced devotion to his master. He has realized that the facts themselves are the best tribute to Gambetta's genius, and in his compilation has suppressed nothing and explained nothing away. Though mostly drawn up by Spuller, Gambetta's secretary, these documents always reproduce the Minister's thoughts, and, as their style shows, often embody his exact words. Thus the real Gambetta is fully and truthfully revealed in these two volumes.

The circulars issued by Gambetta on his assumption of office exhibit the spirit of his policy. Keen party man though he was, he faced his problem fairly. For eighteen years Napoleon III had urged that the Imperial House gave unity to France. Was the bond between sovereign and country so close, asked Gambetta, that now that the Emperor was a prisoner France was also captive? To ask the question was to answer it. All shades of opinion could rally round imperilled France. She was still free, and the Government of National Defence existed to guard her freedom. The argument suggested an appeal to the great tradition of 1793, and Gambetta made effective use of it. But these were words. How comes it that this apostle of patriotism above party appointed new prefects in sixty-two departments by the time he had been three days in office? This aggressive step at once confronted the country with the consequences of the ambiguity surrounding the birth of the new Government. A Republic had replaced the Empire as the supreme authority in France; but the Emperor still

lived and his partisans were still active. In his evidence before the Commission of Inquiry Gambetta admitted that while appointing to prefectures men of every shade of republican opinion he deliberately excluded Bonapartists. This he did because confusion was bound to result if the head of the local administration was out of harmony with the Government of the day. He might have added that such confusion would have been peculiarly dangerous at a time when the question of the future government of France stood in intimate relation with the question of the immediate conduct of the war. A choice of alternatives lay before the Paris Government. Either it must make an honourable peace or it must fight to the end. There were many in Paris and out of it those early September days who were prepared to rely on Bismarck's generosity. Favre himself, when he interviewed the conqueror while the Prussians were closing in round the capital, put the point with much force. What was it, he asked, that had provoked the war? Nothing but the arrogance and ambition of Napoleon III. Well, the Emperor was a prisoner, the Empire had fallen, and the men now in power were themselves guarantees of the complete abandonment of the imperial policy. A new, pacific France had arisen whose one desire was to live in peace and friendship with her German neighbour. Bismarck shattered the pretty dream. He did not doubt Favre's sincerity; he admitted that France was now blowing cold; but at any moment she might blow hot again and Germany must obtain adequate security against her caprices. Once the German terms were known it was clear that the Government's one course was to fight. But the interview at Ferrières had also indicated that the partisans of the Empire were prepared to adopt an opposite course of action. If the Republic was not in a position to make a disastrous peace, the Empire's hands were entirely free. The restoration of the dynasty was the aim, and there were those who were prepared to restore it at the price of the humiliation of France. Gambetta's policy had from the first rested on the assumptions that it was folly to trust either in the magnanimity of the invaders or in the patriotism of the imperialists. Before he had been three weeks in office all admitted the soundness of his views; the report that Favre brought back from Ferrières left no room for illusions. Gambetta himself saw clearly from the first, and it was because he saw clearly that he swept away the heads of the local administration throughout France.

Those who may be tempted to regard his appointments of September 5th and 7th as evidence of party venom have only to project their minds forward a fortnight. Statesmanship never attempts to work with impossible tools, and it is entirely to Gambetta's credit that in spite of his zeal for a comprehensive patriotism he realized at once that the imperial prefects were impossible.

Nevertheless the changes were bound to cause friction. The new appointments roused Bonapartist suspicion and republican passion; and the situation was made all the worse by the fact that the new men seemed to descend from the skies. The republican opposition was working up to a revolution for some time before September 1870, and the leaders of the movement had their lists of local supporters. But the lists were secret, and when the time came men were surprised at the names they included. It seemed as though the new Government had chosen its men by chance. M. de Freycinet has recorded in his memoirs the strange circumstances of his appointment to the prefecture of Tarn-et-Garonne. A railway engineer by profession, he had devoted some days to surveying the system connecting the railway lines with the forts of Paris. He had found a serious flaw in the arrangements and wished to bring it to the notice of the authorities. So he went to the Ministry of the Interior, and to his astonishment was conducted into the presence of the Minister himself. He stated his case, which was heard with attention. When he had finished, Gambetta, without further reference to the matter in hand, inquired whether he had not some connexion with Montauban. M. de Freycinet said Yes, and was immediately appointed prefect. Scarcely able to trust his ears he went to the railway station, only to meet on his way a friend who announced that he had just been appointed to the same post. The department of the Interior was consulted and replied that the Minister's will must prevail; and so the new prefect left for Montauban. The episode is typical of Gambetta's methods. Freycinet's name was down in the *dossier* upon which the new Minister was drawing for his *personnel*. Gambetta saw him, characteristically made up his mind at once that this man was worth using, and offered him an important post. Before very long he was to back his hastily formed opinion of Freycinet in a connexion more vital to himself and to France than appointment to a prefecture.

But M. de Freycinet's appointment is instructive in another

way. Surprising to himself, it was equally surprising to the local republicans. They declined to accept it. M. de Freycinet had been a candidate for office under the Empire, and if they were to have a new prefect at all it must be a man after their own hearts. A riot forced the prefect's resignation, with the consequence that, in a decisive hour, Gambetta found his nominee inadequately employed at Tours. The incident is eloquent of what must have happened in many a department. In some haphazard fashion a new prefect was chosen, and his position at once became exceedingly difficult. If he was a good republican he found it impossible to work with the local council, the majority of whose members were carefully-picked Bonapartists. But if he was not a notorious opponent of the late régime, the suspicious local patriots proceeded to assist and even to supersede him in the organization of defence; and the complications created by these local leagues were perhaps mainly responsible for the eventual departure of Gambetta for Tours.

For the moment, however, the old councils and not the new leagues were the main source of trouble, and Gambetta cut the knot at once by instructing his prefects to work with the local bodies if possible but to dismiss them at once if they proved recalcitrant. In any case the necessary work must be done. The first need was to provide every citizen with a rifle. Next, the departments in the neighbourhood of Paris were instructed to concentrate their resources on the capital, towards which the enemy was directing his march. The outlying departments, on the contrary, were to exert themselves to place some sort of an army in the field, and as a preliminary to this Gambetta directed, on 14 September, a general mobilization of the territorial troops. The work of military organization thus commanded by the Ministry of the Interior was a heavy tax on the capacities of civilian administrators, who had not even had time to become familiar with the system over which they had so suddenly been chosen to preside. Accordingly Gambetta had instructed them from the first to accept such co-operation as was available, and on 10 September he issued the celebrated despatch in which he noted that committees of defence had been formed in certain departments and suggested that the example should be followed. This despatch put into the hands of the more extreme partisans a weapon which they almost succeeded in using with fatal effect. Before many days had elapsed

the various local leagues were menacing the unity of France. Indeed, the despatch was in a sense the charter of the commune. Its issue was perhaps the most serious mistake committed by Gambetta during his period of office. With his passionate conception of France as one and indivisible, he overlooked the separatist tendencies which the great Napoleon had curbed through his admirable system of departments under direct central supervision whereby France is held together to this day. But this much can fairly be said in Gambetta's defence: that his committees were intended as temporary expedients. They were to replace the reactionary local councils and would automatically vanish as soon as new local elections had been held.

It was the Government's intention to hold elections as soon as possible. On 4 September the new Ministers were unanimous in the view that they should be held at once. Four days later a division of opinion showed itself. With the Prussians in occupation of much French territory and daily advancing nearer Paris, it was impossible to hold elections without an armistice. On the other hand there seemed no reason for the Prussians to grant an armistice to the Paris Government. After all, force counted, and the only army left to France was shut up in Metz. If the Prussians were to grant an armistice at all they had some reason for granting it to Bazaine, who would have 170,000 trained troops to confirm any peace to which he might set his signature. The members of the Paris Government who appreciated this point insisted that the Republic must evolve respectable military strength before Bismarck would listen to its representatives. A repetition of 1793 would check the Germans' victorious march. Then an Assembly could be elected and a durable peace properly sanctioned. Those who held this view advocated the adjournment of the elections until 16 October, five weeks away. Another week restored the original unanimity. The Germans were moving nearer Paris and an armistice must be arranged immediately if the capital were to escape a siege. Moreover, the increasing difficulties of departmental administration made it essential that the authority of the Government should receive both local and national recognition. On 17 September it was decided that municipal elections should be held on the 25th, and general elections on 2 October, and on the following day Gambetta issued a highly rhetorical circular giving the necessary instructions to the prefects. The document, in itself unsympathetic and verbose, reads ironically

enough in the light of what was to follow. Early in the morning of the 18th, Favre left Paris to request from Bismarck the armistice whose concession was implicitly assumed in Gambetta's despatch. Conversations on the 19th and 20th convinced him that Bismarck's irreducible minimum included the surrender not only of Strasbourg but of one of the forts dominating Paris. On the 20th Favre was back in Paris, and on the 21st Gambetta issued another circular which stated the German terms, postponed the elections indefinitely, and instructed the prefects to nominate local councils if the existing bodies proved intractable. The last instruction transformed the prefects into petty kings, and was the cause of an immediate and disastrous outbreak of activity on the part of the local leagues. These bodies had dealings not with the central Government in Paris, but with the delegation already sent to Tours to supervise and direct provincial defence ; and the inability of the delegation to make headway against its difficulties was noted with growing anxiety by the Minister of the Interior during the few days that communications still remained open.

Its first week of office sufficed to convince the civilian members of the Provincial Government that Paris was not everything. But the defence of the capital, and especially the concentration within its walls of all the war material in the neighbouring departments, naturally absorbed the attention of General Trochu, and his colleagues, while reluctant, and indeed impotent, to modify his policy, felt that it was causing the equipment of the provinces to languish. Every day, therefore, it became clearer that there must be some formal separation of Paris from France, and that at least one member of the Government must leave the capital ; indeed a decision in this sense was taken on the 8th. On the 9th it was resolved that the intended delegation should establish itself at Tours. But who was to go ? Every man was honourably reluctant to leave the post of immediate danger. Pressure was put upon Favre, who, it was hoped, would rally France round him, but Favre refused to leave. At last the Government made its choice of the man whom it could best spare. It selected Crémieux, partly because of his reputation for established respectability, partly because of his connexion with Touraine in the far-off days of the July monarchy, over and done with twenty years and more. The old lawyer arrived in Tours on 12 September. Two days later he was

joined by M. Glais-Bizoin, with whom his colleagues appear to have parted without reluctance. On the 16th, Admiral Fourichon, the Minister of Marine, was also sent to Tours, entrusted with the Ministry of War in the departments. The sailor was the only expert whom the central Government could spare. At the same time it was decided that each Ministry should despatch a small contingent of its officials, so that the *bureaux*, so indispensable to French administrative ideas, could be organized on orthodox lines. The staff was hard put to it for lack of room. M. Crémieux took up his residence in the Archbishop's house, and the Ministry of the Interior was established in an infant school.

History cannot but smile at the trio to whom provincial France was told to look for the direction of her agonized zeal. Glais-Bizoin was an entirely contemptible person. A mere demagogue, he believed that the situation could be saved by theatrical speeches, and his quarrelsome temper and inability to accept and discharge definite duties made him a source of constant anxiety to his unfortunate colleague in the civil administration. Crémieux, struggling along as best he could with old age and bad health to hamper him, deserves some sympathy. Destitute of strategic insight and of administrative talent, thrust by his colleagues into a position whose responsibilities neither he nor they had adequately realized in advance, he was entirely unable to handle either the men with whom he had to work or the situation with which he had to cope. From the moment of Gambetta's arrival he drops out of history with a sigh of relief almost audible across the gap of years. But he did his duty according to his lights, behaving not indeed with firmness, for that was not in him, but with dignity and patience. One thing he did well. The financial instinct of his race was in him, and he saw to it that the delegation was provided with proper powers for raising money. Moreover, he exercised these powers judiciously. When Gambetta arrived to find so much lacking and so much left undone, there were at least abundant funds at his disposal.

The fullest first-hand account of the work of the delegation is that written by MM. Steenackers and le Goff, both officials of the post office. M. Steenackers himself was a member of the inner circle of Government, and appears to have kept a diary. The value of the book is discounted by its bitterly partisan tone, but its evidence as to facts is sound. No work

better brings out the difference created by the arrival of Gambetta ; and to sympathize with its standpoint, it is only necessary to take note of such of the proceedings of the delegation as bear on Gambetta's departure from Paris and on his earliest actions at Tours.

Responsibility rested with the three members of the Government. To aid them there was formed a consultative council of the heads of departments sent from Paris. No worse arrangement could have been devised. It gave a number of permanent officials power to discuss the principles of policy when they should have been executing its details ; and, as though this were not a sufficient defiance of common sense, it gave power of discussion without adding responsibility for decision. Worst of all, it gave full scope for conflicts between the militant republicans and the patriots who urged that nothing mattered except defence. From Admiral Fourichon's point of view the position was absolutely intolerable. It was hard enough that he, the one member of the Government with military knowledge, should have to convince two civilian colleagues ; but to make him listen to the views of a number of civil servants who were sometimes anxious to talk party politics and whose opinions were in any case of no real account, was to turn government into a farce. The Admiral was not by nature a man of conciliatory disposition. Placed as he was, he determined to take no notice of any of the members of the Council, whether they had votes or not. It mattered not if on a military question he found himself in a minority of one ; in his best quarter-deck style he declared that he would have his way or resign, and the more developments in the departments forced politics to the front, the more distinctly did he maintain his uncompromising attitude. His principles were two. The first was that discipline must be upheld, and the second that if he was to maintain his authority with the army at all he must keep on good terms with his military subordinate, General Lefort. On both points he was right, and by insisting on discipline he did his country good service. The new recruits enrolled in the first few days after Sedan were little inclined to obey their officers, of whose capacity and patriotism they were thoroughly suspicious. Cases of disorder occurred, and on 27 September Fourichon dealt with the situation by decreeing martial law. This wise and necessary measure was firmly maintained by Gambetta.

But Fourichon was less happily inspired in his determination to stand by Lefort. Lefort was an honest man of the old school. He believed in red-tape—which in the eyes of his compatriots was the cause of Sedan—and he was quite clear that the organization could never work smoothly unless he kept all the threads in his own hands. There resulted not only great congestion of business—Lefort's health finally collapsed under the strain—but constant quarrels between soldiers and civilians in Tours itself. These quarrels did not fail to aggravate the situation outside.

From the first the delegation was in doubt as to its function. On the one hand its business was to supervise provincial defence. On the other hand it felt itself to be a mere expression of the will of Paris, whence the departments were still governed. Moreover, it had no clear ideas as to the meaning of provincial defence. To the delegation Paris was France, and Paris would be saved either by her own exertions or by the intervention of Europe. In either case the army of the Loire, which the delegation was to organize, would be a spectacular body. This complete misapprehension of the facts as they really were accounts for the amazing summary of its work which the delegation sent to Paris on 1 October. It reported that there were 80,000 troops on the Loire, another 80,000 elsewhere, and a third army in the course of formation. This was indeed to confuse reality with aspiration. Of the 160,000 men so confidently spoken of, a bare tenth were actually available. Nevertheless it would not be true to say that the delegation did nothing. It brought up reserves from Algeria, it collected the débris of material available in France, it gathered the nucleus of the XVth Army Corps, it created regional commands and made a beginning of territorial organization, and above all it appointed an Armaments Commission under MM. Cazot and Lecesne which started to deal with the vital question of providing new material.

The main reason that the delegation's plans for military organization remained so entirely in the air was the hostile attitude of the departments. Mention has been made of the despatch in which Gambetta had urged the formation of local defence committees. From the very beginning the ideas of the local patriots had gone beyond departmental defence. Regional defence was the keynote of the new movement. Bordeaux formed a union of six departments and Clermont of three,

and as early as 9 September the prefect of the Gironde was telegraphing for a commissary-general of defence. In a few days six local leagues covered all France not in the occupation of the enemy. The two most important were the League of the West, which embraced thirteen departments in Brittany, and the Southern League, which included both Lyons and Marseilles, and which was viewed with much alarm by the prefect of the former, while it forced the prefect of the latter to assume its presidency. Both these leagues were harassed by political controversies. The Western League included men of every shade of opinion, and its central Committee at Rennes was distracted by party feuds of the kind that were causing so much trouble to the central Government. The Southern League, on the other hand, was so intensely republican that the red flag was hoisted at Lyons. Faced with this situation the delegation viewed with horror the decree of 18 September, which, by ordering local elections, necessarily brought the departmental prefects into the thick of League politics. Crémieux wrote a pathetic letter to Gambetta pleading against this decision, but gave in with his usual obedient weakness when he found that Paris was firm. Before many days were up the Tours Government was to discover that in immediate elections lay its one hope of maintaining its shadowy authority.

Already the claims of regional defence were interfering with plans for the Loire army. The local committees, impatient and suspicious of Tours, were taking such arms as could be found for the equipment of the local forces. And now a series of events convinced the leagues that their sole hope was in themselves. On the 22nd the news of Bismarck's terms destroyed the chance of an immediate peace; and five days later Strasbourg surrendered. On the same day Polhès, the general commanding the troops at Orleans, felt compelled to evacuate that important strategic point, and Tours itself was in peril. Excitement throughout the provinces was at fever-heat. Everywhere there were rumours of the coming of the Prussians. Everywhere the remaining officers of the disgraced imperial army were viewed with growing suspicion. Men's minds turned back to 1793. From all quarters came demands for civilian commissioners of defence with plenary powers. Anarchy ensued at Tours. On the one hand the prefects insisted that the commissioners would usurp their authority, and appealed to Crémieux for support. On the other hand Fourichon was

resolute that no civil functionary should be superior to the officer commanding locally. Finding his colleagues against him in regard to an occurrence at Lyons, which he made a test case, he resigned. On 29 September Crémieux, feeling himself powerless to govern a rebellious country, issued a decree re-ordaining the elections which Paris had cancelled a week earlier. With the prospect of early confirmation of his authority, the poor weak man attempted to solve the problem of disputed control by declaring that commissioners of defence should not be appointed unless asked for, and even then should only enjoy power within the limits of a single department. The still more difficult problem of the conflict between soldiers and civilians in the matter of organization he endeavoured to dispose of by putting the Ministry of War into commission. But a stronger hand was about to grasp the reins of Government. The election decree had been despatched to Paris by pigeon post, and had reached the Government on 1 October. It was proposed that Gambetta should leave for Tours. Gambetta refused, and with the anxieties of the siege to occupy its attention, the Government let the matter stand over for two days. On the 3rd it was proposed that Favre should leave on the ground that the Minister for Foreign Affairs ought to be able to communicate with foreign Governments. But Favre also refused. It became necessary to appoint a man by vote, and the choice inevitably fell on Gambetta.

By the 6th all was ready, but a breeze too light to carry a balloon over the Prussian lines delayed departure for another twenty-four hours. At last, at 11 o'clock on the morning of the 7th, Gambetta rose from Montmartre in the balloon "Armand Barbès," a long pennant with *Vive la République* fluttering from the car. The Minister was accompanied by his secretary, M. Spuller, and by the aeronaut, M. Trichet. A second balloon which left at the same time descended without mishap, and well beyond the Prussian lines, at four in the afternoon, but the Minister was destined to have a more adventurous voyage. Scarcely had the light south-west breeze carried his balloon beyond the lines of the fort when it was perceived and fired at by the enemy's outposts. It was then nearly 2000 feet up, but soon afterwards an error on the part of the pilot caused it to descend rapidly, until it actually touched ground. A quantity of ballast was thrown out and, aided by a fall of snow which increased the moisture of the atmosphere, the balloon

rose again ; but it was less than 500 feet up when it passed over the heads of German troops near Creil. Happily the soldiers had piled arms, and by the time they had seized their rifles, the guard rope had been cut, and the balloon thus further lightened, had risen to about 1000 feet. Even so Gambetta's hand was grazed by a German bullet. The worst danger was now over, though more shots were fired as the balloon passed the limits of the German lines near Montdidier. It only remained to bring to earth the balloon, rendered almost unmanageable by the desperate expedients adopted to keep it aloft. The ripping cord was pulled, but the balloon drifted into a forest, and it was only after some dangerous moments that the timely assistance of peasants enabled a landing to be made. A local guide then conducted Gambetta round behind the Prussian lines, and in the evening he reached Amiens.

On the morning of the 8th the Tours delegation was startled to receive a telegram from Amiens. It bore Gambetta's signature, and informed his colleagues that he was already on his way to join them. It also contained the text of his decree in which the Paris Government overruled the delegation's decision to hold elections, and declared that any steps taken to give effect to it were null and void. Of the letter which his Parisian colleagues had addressed to Fourichon, inviting him to co-operate with the new Minister and not take alarm at his southern fervour, Gambetta made no mention in his telegram, and on finding that Fourichon was no longer in office, he decided not to present it. He also kept in reserve a decree giving him two votes to his colleagues' one. Thus equipped with almost plenary powers Gambetta reached Tours soon after midday on 9 October.

VIII

GAMBETTA THE GOVERNOR OF FRANCE

“**L**ET’S get to work” were Gambetta’s first words on arriving at Tours. The first condition of work was proper contact with the departments, and Gambetta characteristically chose the director of telegraphs as his companion during the short drive from the station to the headquarters of the Government. Before one o’clock he was discussing the situation with his colleagues. The immediate issue was the action of the Paris Government in cancelling the elections decree. Gambetta listened, stated his case, convinced his opponents, and established his mastery over his council. He used his strength to force a decision on a vital point. The Ministry of War was vacant, and as Lefort’s health forbade him to accept it, Gambetta decided to take it himself. Crémieux and Glais-Bizoin raised a protest against this concentration of powers, but Fourichon paid off old scores by adding his vote to Gambetta’s two. The appointment thus took effect without any formal decree from Paris.¹

Ignorant as he was of Fourichon’s resignation, Gambetta had not anticipated military responsibility, and had not discussed plans with Trochu before leaving Paris. The necessity of pulling the disorganized provincial defence together explains his action after his arrival at Tours. His position thus settled, he set himself, with the help of his most unobtrusive, sympathetic, and capable of secretaries, Eugène Spuller, to compose two proclamations, in which the main lines of his policy were laid down with absolute clearness. In his circular to the people of France—that famous Dantonian call to arms, which roused the leisurely provincials like the sound of a trumpet—Gambetta proclaimed his intention of organizing the relief of Paris, whose magnificent spirit and wonderful energy were described

¹ I have followed Glais-Bizoin’s account of this somewhat obscure episode.

in glowing terms. Next he explained the nature of his own authority, and was thus led to analyse the situation confronting him. He insisted that this situation imposed two duties on all Frenchmen, the first to let no thought but war enter their minds, the second to give brotherly adhesion to the republican Government, born of necessity and justice. Its mission was to save France, and it could command men ready to give effect to its patriotic purpose. But the men lacked leadership and arms. Paris and Metz contained the reserves of both officers and guns. Arrangements had been made, continued the Minister in language intended to command the respect of the regional leagues, to get possession of all the guns available throughout the markets of the world. So, when the resources of France were utilized, the provinces roused from their apathy, and men's minds dispossessed of their vain terror, the national war would be set in train. He ended on the key-note of his work during the coming months: "Let us rise as one man and die rather than endure the shame of dismemberment." The circular to the army was in equally strong terms, and contained a pledge never to be fulfilled, though attempts at its fulfilment were destined to cause Gambetta perhaps more anxiety than all his other preoccupations combined. "I mean to give you," he told his soldiers, "young and energetic leaders with the brains and power to repeat the miracles of 1792. With this aim I shall not hesitate to break with the old administrative tradition." Little wonder that this language roused misgivings in the officers' corps and especially in the heart of the general whom Gambetta was already minded to select for the supreme command.

It is clear from these proclamations that in coming to Tours Gambetta intended to devote himself to the organization of a nation in arms. His language in private bore this out. "I should think I was robbing my country," he told a friend, "if I filched one single instant of thought from National Defence and devoted it to domestic politics." Unhappily the march of events caused questions of domestic politics to occupy many of his precious first hours. The authority of the delegation was already weakened by its failure to control the regional leagues, and within twenty-four hours of Gambetta's arrival, news came through which extinguished the last spark of public confidence in Tours. On 9 October, General Dupré, one of the officers commanding the miscellaneous collection of terri-

torial troops which was called the eastern army and was intended to create a diversion in the Vosges, was defeated and killed in battle, and the beaten army fell back in disorder on Besançon. The next day the army of the Loire, a force of 60,000 men under the command of de la Motterouge, came into touch with the German force moving on Orleans. It was defeated, and the next day Orleans was in German hands. This then was the result of the month's work of the delegation. It had created two field forces, both of which broke at the first brush with the enemy. It is little short of a marvel that the tottering fabric of Government did not immediately collapse, and it is altogether a marvel that eighteen days later Gambetta's improvised reconstitution was able to stand the shock of the surrender of Metz. In the following year Gambetta told the Commission of Inquiry that he had suppressed the leagues within eighteen days. It was an understatement. The eighteenth day saw his work not only completed, but approved. It was on 24 October, a fortnight after his arrival, that Gambetta sent to Paris by pigeon post a photomicrographed despatch, giving an account of the suppression of the leagues, whose importance he deliberately minimized. "There had been formed," he explained, "in the south and east certain leagues of departments—bodies which, while eager to defend France and her new institutions, were putting forward pretensions to executive power. I am happy to inform you that a little frank firmness was enough to put a stop to this rivalry. The leagues are dissolved." Nor except at Marseilles, the original centre of disaffection, was any serious threat of their recrudescence to disturb the unity of France in the troubles now crowding upon her. On the whole, then, Gambetta had reason to be satisfied with the country's response to his appeal. But the experience of this first fortnight had taught him that local politicians were not to be trusted too far, and on 24 October he submitted the justice and expediency of excluding from office all functionaries of the Empire—the recommendation which was ultimately to bring about the final breach with his Paris colleagues.

The conduct which Gambetta euphemistically describes as a "little frank firmness," was really an amazing exertion of personality. M. de Freycinet, in the "*Souvenirs*," written in the evening of his days, notes that among all the distinguished Frenchmen with whom he had been brought into contact,

GAMBETTA

Gambetta was pre-eminent for giving the impression of power. There was power here. In the intervals of the stupendous task of calling a new military organization into being in a country without soldiers, without arms, and with the enemy besieging its capital, Gambetta imposed his will on the local authorities from the other end of a telegraph wire. At first, indeed, he found it necessary to pay personal visits to Marseilles, Lyons, St Etienne, and Toulouse, and himself supervise the release of political prisoners. But the inspiring circular of 9 October won him his battle. A week later he reported to Paris that the towns were eager, though he noted that the villages were still apathetic. In fact, however, his circular had roused the villages too; patriotic addresses poured into Tours; and the towns realized that the local leadership at which they were aiming was lost to them since the masses, hitherto silent, were looking to Tours for instructions and help. Having thus recaptured control by a single outburst of patriotic energy Gambetta never allowed it to slip from his hands. The circular had won France, but what held France was the Minister's unfaltering grip of administrative detail. Not a prefect but felt that the eye of his master was upon him, and M. Reinach's volumes include a telegram of severe censure on one suspected of shirking responsibility for the execution of instructions. Nor did minute matters escape him. Thus on 12 December when he was just taking up the work of reorganizing a defeated army, he demanded the resignation of the sous-prefect of St Malo because that functionary had presumed to communicate directly with M. Thiers instead of addressing himself to the Minister of the Interior. A week later he complained of a prefect "who perorates in his reports." Another was rebuked for consulting his chief about so trivial a matter as the burial of a bishop, while a third, who had asked that the demand for the resignation of an obstreperous mayor should be withdrawn, was sharply told that no man was indispensable. Even in January, when Bourbaki was making his last desperate bid to retrieve the fortunes of war, Gambetta found time to remind prefects that all private telegrams must be paid for. The public purse could not have had a more vigilant guardian, and his enemies afterwards sought in vain for the slightest evidence of corruption.

Gambetta's general practice was to allow his prefects as free a hand as was compatible with his supreme control, and

only to throw out a word of encouragement or warning as occasion required. But when events brought him into direct relations with some departmental chief, he was at pains to show that he had all the details at his finger-ends. Thus at the beginning of December, when it was decided to remove the seat of Government to Bordeaux, he sent the local prefect precise instructions as to the arrangements required. The various administrations were to be housed in the quarters of the corresponding provincial branch, and of the new services the telegraphs were to have first claim on his attention. That the man on the spot would himself have the best knowledge of what should be done was an idea alien to Gambetta's mind, and would, indeed, be little likely to occur to any Frenchman.

Perhaps the best conception of Gambetta's relations with his prefects can be formed by a study of the sixteen pages which M. Reinach gives to his telegrams to M. Challemel-Lacour. Challemel-Lacour was prefect of the Rhone, and responsible for order in Lyons. He was a man of capacity and insight, who generally did the right thing but distrusted himself for doing it. Gambetta, who understood him thoroughly, not only arranged for him to come to Tours and talk things over, but entered into a practical partnership with him in the conduct of his important office. His telegrams, written in an unvarying tone of kindly firmness, inspired the prefect with just that degree of moral courage that he lacked. The situation was certainly difficult. The Prussians were moving on the Saône valley, and there was nothing between them and Lyons except the demoralized army of the east and the city's own irregular levies. Moreover, the prefect went in constant terror of a Socialist outbreak. Such a position demanded some consideration from the head of the executive, but it stirs our admiration to find that the man who was carrying the conduct of the war and the government of France on his shoulders entered into Challemel-Lacour's difficulties as though he had nothing else to do but offer him advice and encouragement. It was thanks to Gambetta's constant vigilance that the situation in Lyons never got out of hand. Scarcely had he reasserted the authority of the central Government when the news of the surrender of Metz threatened to undo all that had been achieved. The Southern League woke to renewed activity, and again attempted to take local defence into its own hands. The moment was critical. France felt herself betrayed, and every

patriot was tempted to seize such weapons as lay to his hand lest the incapacity or treason of the authorities should lead to their transference to the Prussians. Colonel Thoumas, an able officer who was head of the artillery department at Tours, notes in his memoirs the pressure put upon Gambetta to allow some measure of decentralization, and justly observes that acquiescence "would have been fatal, since the local arsenals and stores would have been stripped bare the very instant that a local authority was given control over the war material within its jurisdiction." But Gambetta was not the man to yield on a vital point. His sharp veto of a proposal to tax capital, backed by a threat of immediate dissolution, brought the communist municipality of Lyons to reason, and the city would have recovered its tranquillity but for the fact that the transference of the army of the Vosges to the Loire—a measure rendered necessary in view of the westward march of Prince Frederick Charles' army—left the Rhone valley open to attack. The municipality worked hard at the organization of the National Guard, but public feeling remained nervous and excited until, towards Christmas, Gambetta felt compelled to travel to Lyons in person. There, as everywhere, his presence brought confidence, and there was no more trouble.

Lyons, however, was less turbulent than Marseilles. The great port was the only city in France in which Gambetta's authority was seriously disputed. Marseilles was the headquarters of the Southern League and, though the minister just managed to keep the situation in hand, it may be doubted whether his authority would have endured the shock of a German move on the Rhone valley. The root of the mischief was that Esquiros who, as prefect of the Bouches du Rhone, was responsible for order at Marseilles, was a republican of a far more extreme type than his colleague at Lyon and was prepared to co-operate with agitators whom he should have suppressed. In his anxiety to keep on good terms with the patriots he had accepted the presidency of the Southern League and was speedily guilty of conduct which transgressed Gambetta's principle of domestic policy that all considerations must be subordinated to defence. When the situation at Marseilles was brought to Gambetta's notice on 13 October, Esquiros had arrested and expelled a group of Jesuit priests and had suppressed a paper which had published the Comte de Chambord's manifesto and had advocated the candidature of the

Prince de Joinville. Gambetta sent a strong telegram peremptorily forbidding the suppression of personal or journalistic liberty. Esquiros pleaded that he had acted in defence of threatened republican institutions and, when the minister was firm, asked for a few days' grace in order that the excitement might subside. Gambetta was adamant, and on the 15th the prefect's resignation was accepted. In replacing him Gambetta made one of his rare mistakes in civilian appointments. At the first council held on his arrival in Tours the case for an early election had been argued with vigour and ability by one of the consultative members, M. Marc Dufraisse. It was possibly with an idea of conciliating Tours opinion that Gambetta sent Dufraisse to Marseilles. The new prefect found a condition of affairs which bore out his views that the Republic could not govern without popular sanction. Amid the cheers of the mob Esquiros refused to give way to his half-hearted successor, and Dufraisse reported him indispensable. For over a week Marseilles was given over to demonstrations and counter-demonstrations until the fall of Metz compelled Gambetta to take drastic steps. Superseding Dufraisse he appointed Gent, a man after his own heart, to the vacant prefectship. Gent arrived on 2 November. By this time the extremists had secured control. One Cluseret directed affairs, and Esquiros sat in the prefecture and wrote what he was ordered. Happily Cluseret was a man who recognized Gambetta's sincerity and the heads of the league offered no serious opposition to the ministerial nominee. It was different with the populace. Gent was badly handled in a riot, and Gambetta at once cut Marseilles off from telegraphic communication with the rest of France and sent his prefect a garrison of 8000 men. With this assistance the better elements soon regained the upper hand, and by the middle of the month Gent could report that the mob had heartily repented of its folly. Nevertheless the fact that Gambetta had to overawe the Massiliots with troops raised and equipped to fight the foreign enemy is proof that at Marseilles his administrative system almost collapsed. That his method of maintaining it was dictatorial must be admitted; but the rest of France was with him, and the episode stands alone.

Freedom of the person and freedom of the press were regarded by Gambetta as conditions essential to the patriotic outburst which was to clear France of the invader. As he wrote to Favre just after his arrival at Tours, "it is hard to fight both

the enthusiasts and the reactionaries at the same time"; and it seemed to him that the only way to prevent a repetition of the excesses of eighty years before was to hold the scales of administrative justice absolutely even.

His earlier instructions to his prefects laid the utmost stress on the liberty of the press. "I cannot authorize your entry," he wrote, "on the perilous path of newspaper prosecution. Criticism must be entirely free, and the Republic owes it to herself to live in the midst of party polemics." Research among the newspapers of the time shows that Gambetta lived up to this maxim. The press was amazingly outspoken, at any rate till after the fall of Metz, and though the prefect of the Nord department was instructed to prevent the entry of Bonapartist organs published in Belgium, the French imperialist press was actually permitted to describe republicans as domestic Prussians. A week before Metz surrendered, however, Gambetta had realized that the situation required watching and appointed his friend Ranc to the office of Director of Public Safety. It was part of the Director's duty to make a careful examination of the press and to submit a daily resumé for Gambetta's perusal. The rigours of the censorship were to be directed against papers publishing news, true and false, which might give the Germans information as to the movements of French troops. In this event the editor was to be prosecuted for treason. "Strike the man, but spare the paper," was Gambetta's instruction to his prefects. As for private correspondence, it was, of course, to be treated as sacred. But after the capitulation of Metz sterner measures, both against newspapers and against individuals, were felt to be necessary. Not only were Bonapartist intrigues afoot among the officers of the army and among both officers and men of the navy, not only were the voices of those prepared to make peace without honour heard more insistently as the war dragged on to its disastrous close, but the public fear of an imperialist conspiracy grew with every fresh misfortune until at last Gambetta began to believe in it himself. All through November he had insisted in his despatches to his Paris colleagues that Bonapartists' candidatures must be forbidden, and at the end of the month he went so far as to say that this was "a matter of salvation or disaster to our cherished ideas." But until the close of the year he endeavoured to keep to his earlier principles. When early in November the prefect of Toulouse arrested some five officers

on the suspicion of intrigue, his action was at once disavowed. The utmost that Gambetta would allow was that undoubted anti-republicans should be requested to leave France.

But gradually restrictions tightened. On 20 December, he telegraphed to Crémieux, the Minister of Justice, to dissolve the local authorities as being "the very heart of Bonapartist treason." The dissolution decree was issued on Christmas Day, and was followed three weeks later by the really despotic instruction that all educational and financial officials guilty of imperialist sympathies should be relieved of their posts. By that time the press had felt the weight of his hand. In the latter half of December Ranc had reported that the loss of *morale* among the troops was due to their having read the criticisms of the reactionary press, and steps were taken to prevent the circulation of these papers in districts where troops were stationed. Had this repression proved effective press criticism would have been forbidden over such parts of France as were not occupied by the Germans. Extreme measures of this kind, excusable though they might be on the ground that nothing could be permitted that would give a handle to Bismarck's intrigues, were evidence enough that the policy of war to the death had lost its appeal. Gambetta was ceasing to be the leader of a patriotic movement and was becoming a dictator. Indeed he admitted in his evidence before the Commission of Inquiry that after the middle of December the country wanted elections because it owned itself beaten. To Gambetta himself, however, such an admission was impossible. So long as he was minister he would fight. Anything else was treason. From this ground he never stirred, and in the end, as will be seen, resigned rather than give way. Our estimate of his conduct must needs be affected by his severity during these last few weeks, but it is of a piece with his attitude throughout, and the advantages of that attitude to France were so enormous that its logical excesses may surely be forgiven.

IX

GAMBETTA THE MINISTER

GAMBETTA had called France to arms for the relief of Paris. The maintenance of regular communication with his colleagues in the capital was therefore regarded by him as the basis of his strategy, and in all his vast volume of work nothing caused him so much worry. The system did not function smoothly and Gambetta, just because he was accomplishing impossibilities, never realized that it could not be made to function smoothly. Paris sent out its messages by balloons, each of whose aeronauts carried a cage of carrier pigeons. When a balloon descended the pigeons were forwarded to Tours. Photo-micrographed despatches were then fastened onto their wings and the birds were released. It is clear that such an arrangement depended on a series of lucky accidents for its efficacy. Gambetta himself was wholly at the mercy of Paris. If Paris did not send out pigeons his chance of communication was gone. Hence his insistence on the importance of the service. His reports to Paris are full of requests for more birds. "In heaven's name," he writes to the Government, "send up at least one balloon with pigeons every day. They are the chief State service." Stringent instructions were sent to the local authorities that all pigeons coming from Paris must be forwarded to Tours at once and must not be released locally under any circumstances. But at best the supply was both uncertain and inadequate. At one point at the beginning of December, when an attempt was in progress to organize co-operation between the Loire army and the besieged forces, his patience gave way. "I cannot control Prussian sentinels, nor the birds' flight, nor the wind's caprices" was his reply to complaints from the capital of inadequate information as to his intentions; and with a rhetorical petulance rare with him he went on to say that he was content to lay his case before the bar of posterity.

The importance of these Paris communications was three-fold. In the first place it was consistently maintained by Gambetta that there was only one Government in France—the Government of National Defence. Four of its members were at Tours, the rest were in Paris, but all decrees issued and all action taken by either group were in the name of the Government as a whole. This was of special importance in the domain of finance. It was only as the agent of the *de facto* Government that Gambetta could float war-loans at tolerable rates.¹ Had he really set himself up as dictator—the charge afterwards brought against him by his enemies—he might well have found it impossible to borrow at all. It was on these lines that he framed his reply to his colleagues' complaint, made a month after his arrival in Tours, that he was taking too much upon himself. He was doing, he admitted, all that a Government could do, but that was because his colleagues were necessarily unable to assist him. True that he had himself arranged a loan in London on 24 October. But the money was wanted, and how could Paris negotiate with foreign bankers? If his action was disapproved, the proper course, and one which he himself advised, was that a majority of the Government should come to Tours. The advice was sincere. Gambetta was not greedy of power; but when the choice lay between unsupported action and inactivity he felt it his duty to act. That his action carried greater weight when supported by his colleagues in Paris was obvious, especially in financial matters; and towards Christmas, when he was making his final efforts and the needs of the army might have claimed all his attention, we find him addressing to Paris an insistent appeal for funds.

But if he leans upon Paris, Paris must also lean upon him. In his view the delegation at Tours counted for as much as the central body in Paris, and decisions binding on the Government as a whole could not be taken without his consent. This point was emphasized in his correspondence with Favre, on whom as Foreign Minister there fell the direction of the most vital issue of general policy, the negotiations with the enemy.

The two men tried hard to understand one another, and there is a pathetic ring about their later letters with their

¹ The "Morgan loan" was negotiated in London by Gambetta's agents, MM. Laurier and de Germiny. The amount contracted for was 250,000,000 francs, but only some 200,000,000 francs were actually received. The net rate of interest was about 8 per cent. This was Gambetta's only foreign loan.

mutual protests that in spite of disagreements they are still friends. Gambetta's position was that he would not accept any armistice which did not provide for the revictualling of Paris and did not sanction the exclusion of Bonapartist candidates from the elections. Any less favourable terms could not be made in the name of the Government of France, but only on behalf of the administration of Paris. It was an impossible contention, in view of the fact that Bismarck would not negotiate with Favre except in his capacity as Minister of Foreign Affairs. In accordance with his resolve, declared as early as 3 November, Gambetta eventually resigned from a Cabinet in which he had been overruled on a vital point, but neither at the time nor afterwards did he realize that his colleagues had no choice but to overrule him.

In the second place, and with a view to the proper determination of policy, Gambetta strove to keep his colleagues informed of the situation both at home and abroad. In his general comments he showed a surprising readiness to credit idle rumour. Twice at least he is found expressing the view that England or Russia or both would intervene—a question about which he could speak with no more authority than the man in the street—and he was equally insistent on other matters of which he was equally ignorant, such as the growing weariness of the Germans, their king's despondency, and their incapacity to stand the financial strain. In his reports on conditions in France he felt it his duty to adopt a tone of encouraging confidence. Thus within a week of his arrival, he reported mere gossip about Prince Frederick Charles's illness, and added that the rumour of Moltke's death appeared "almost confirmed." On the state of opinion in France his despatches were better informed. He was at special pains to convince his colleagues that his original contention was sound, and that France could fight, even without Paris. Most particularly did he impress upon them that the crowning blow of the surrender of Metz had produced an outburst of indignant patriotism, and that his proclamation, putting the blame on treacherous leaders, expressed the general opinion. He feared that his colleagues would not sufficiently appreciate the changes which his exertions had produced in the general military situation, and the terms of the final armistice showed that his fears were justified. "France is herself again," he wrote to Favre after he had been six weeks

at work and his armies were preparing for the offensive ; " she has renewed her political and social strength. Never, I am sure, have I more faithfully interpreted my country's feelings." Language like this, he felt, should have convinced even the harassed Government of a besieged city that there were other factors to be considered besides its own necessities.

The third and most important object of Gambetta's communications with Paris was to secure concerted military operations. For the first two months after his arrival the relief of Paris was the sole aim of his endeavours. But if Paris was to be relieved, the besieged army must break out at the same moment as the relieving force made its attack. Even after the plan of relief had been abandoned, a seasonable sortie from Paris would create a diversion favourable to operations elsewhere. The record of Gambetta's military exertions will show how these plans for concerted action broke down. It is by these exertions that his conduct during these four months was mainly appraised by his contemporaries and is now judged by history, and perhaps their narration has waited too long. But if full justice is to be done to Gambetta, it must be borne in mind that all through this period he was doing the work of four men. As Minister of the Interior he was governing France, as a colleague of the Paris Government he was consulting, advising and encouraging its members at the Hotel de Ville, as Minister of War he was raising, equipping, and organizing an army, and as the main author of the defence movement he was continually at work among the troops, evolving order out of defeat, heartening broken men, bringing new hope to despair.

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Besides his enthusiasm, Gambetta brought with him to Tours a quality of incalculable value. He had the bureaucratic instinct. The most experienced administrator might well have failed to cope with the conditions prevailing at Tours ; Gambetta, whose practical knowledge of affairs was only a month old, understood how to get business done. Within forty-eight hours of his arrival the whole administration had been reconstructed on sound lines. His first thought was naturally of War Office organization. Before he reached Tours he had decided to appoint a secretary whose duty it would be to deal with the immense amount of telegraphic correspondence, and arrange it suitably for ministerial

decisions. The offer of this post was made to M. Léance Detroyat, a naval officer turned journalist, and was accepted. But the experience of the first council convinced Gambetta that a more thorough-going reconstruction was required. He resolved to appoint not a private secretary but a coadjutor—delegate was the title eventually decided upon. The term suggests false associations to the English mind. There was no delegation of powers. Gambetta remained Minister of War in fact as in name. He was daily concerned with the minute details of the department, and, of course, decided all important questions of policy. He delegated work rather than authority, but in delegating it he did not part with his control. He reserved and exercised the right of examining and even altering what was done. It is amazing that such an arrangement, under which two men could be doing the same thing, and the inferior could never be certain of the exact measure of his authority, should have worked at all. Nevertheless it not only worked, but worked perfectly. Its success is due to the personal relations between Gambetta and his subordinate. The Minister was not a bureaucrat of the formal school. He thought in terms of men not of business, and when he found a man with whom he could work everything went on oiled wheels. On the other hand not the most careful division of functions enabled him to co-operate with a man antipathetic to his temperament. Of the generals with whom he was associated in the Loire defence, his first choice, D'Aurelle de Paladines, had far more definite authority, and was subjected to far less local interference than his later nominee, Chanzy. But Gambetta never pulled comfortably in harness with D'Aurelle, whereas with Chanzy he never had the shadow of a misunderstanding, even when he was reorganizing Chanzy's army on the spot. But by far the best example of the harmony resulting from mutual confidence is found in Gambetta's relations with his delegate at the Tours war office. The delegate was Freycinet. Freycinet was an engineer, and Gambetta liked engineers. As Freycinet himself tells us in his "Souvenirs," which are full of interesting personal touches, the only papers over which Gambetta showed inclination to linger with affectionate interest were the reports, with their concentrated detail and illuminating marginal sketches, sent in by the improvised force of military engineers. But Freycinet also made some personal appeal to his chief. It was

with a quickness of judgment unusual even for him that Gambetta had made Freycinet a prefect. Local jealousy compelled him to resign the post, and Gambetta found him at Tours working in the Armaments Commission. He had appreciated the possibilities of provincial defence, and had set out his ideas in a memorandum, which was at once brought to Gambetta's notice. On the afternoon of 10 October, the two men had a short talk. The same day Detroyat patriotically resigned, and Freycinet's appointment was gazetted. Gambetta believed that he had found his Carnot.

Freycinet was a man whom it is easier to respect than to admire. He had the organizer's talent. He had moreover a quick mind. He brought to his work perseverance, shrewdness, decision, and not a little insight. He never lost his temper and he never grew tired. But he lacked two qualities necessary to the born administrator. He was neither sympathetic nor humble. His prejudices were strong, and clerically-minded officers of the imperial army stood high among his dislikes. His relations with D'Aurelle de Paladines were full of the friction born of distrust, and were partly responsible for D'Aurelle's failure. Still more disastrous was his inability to recognize his own limitations. He was an amateur soldier of the best type. He could plan campaigns but could not lead men, and it was his besetting weakness that he never grasped the technical difficulties attaching to a perfect paper scheme. He elaborated combinations worthy of a Moltke, and when they were not brought off, put the blame on the officers in the field. He was a good worker who found fault with his tools because they were not ideal.

With his acute and nimble mind and his real genius for departmental organization, Freycinet—whose appointment to office without portfolio in M. Briand's cabinet of 1915, makes him a unique link between the two wars—rendered magnificent service to his chief, and but for one circumstance might have deserved equally well of his country. Unhappily events so developed as to bring out Freycinet's worst qualities. Prone to take too much upon himself, his hand was forced by the fact that the bulk of the staff work fell upon his office. Who else was to undertake it? The disasters of September had robbed France of almost all her officers, and the few generals in the field were overwhelmed with the work of disciplining raw recruits. The brain of the army must be located at Tours or nowhere.

Besides, it was Tours which received and tabulated the reports sent in by the newly organized intelligence service, and it was Tours which was first informed of the intentions of Paris, by whose needs the military situation was dominated. Strategy accordingly came to be shaped by the Tours war office, and especially by its head, the astute doctrinaire whose technical knowledge enabled him to put protesting generals to confusion. The only appeal was to Gambetta, and Gambetta was himself a civilian who understood the engineer better than the soldier. Never realizing that the soldier's trade is a highly specialized business, Gambetta and Freycinet commanded their officers to execute plans far beyond the competence of the staff and the steadiness of the troops, holding always that the general's opposition was evidence either of the paralyzing traditions of Napoleon's régime or of personal incapacity and political malice.

The blame for much that went wrong, and especially for Bourbaki's last tragic enterprise, attaches primarily to Freycinet; but Freycinet was Gambetta's own nominee, and the subordinate's mistake reveals the defects of the chief's temperament. The two men themselves were ideal colleagues. At no time, not when they were apart, nor in the hour of disaster, nor even when Gambetta telegraphed direct instructions to the general in the field without informing his delegate, was there any cloud between them. Widely different as they were in habits of thought and of work, their perfect co-operation reflects credit on the good sense and adaptability of both.

X

GAMBETTA THE MAKER OF ARMIES

THE series of decrees in which Gambetta solved his problem of military organization extends in date from the time of his arrival in Tours to the final days of his term of office. In all essentials, however, his scheme was complete by 25 November, complete not only on paper but according to the test of facts. Six weeks is a short time in which to bring an army into the field, but as a matter of fact the bulk of the work was done not in six weeks but in three. It was not until the opening of November that Gambetta was able to start on the serious execution of his plans. Difficulties of domestic administration and the need of repairing military disasters contributed to delay him, but the main obstacle was the absence of any organization through which to work. There was no war office in Tours. Paris had all the papers, and the staff were either besieged or prisoners. When Freycinet took charge he found that the headquarters staff was composed of two generals and two colonels. One man controlled equipment, commissariat, pay, and medical service; and there was no inspectorate at all. The shortage of men was never completely overcome. Even on 1 January, a staff of 66 was controlling the administrative work which had found employment for a staff of 239 in Paris before the war. But, within a few hours of Freycinet's appointment, Gambetta had sanctioned a plan of war office organization, had grappled with the lack of accommodation in a third-class provincial town, and had installed his new department in the building which Prince Frederick Charles paid him the compliment of selecting as his headquarters when he occupied the town a few weeks later. The work of the war office was well distributed departmentally. The chief department was the Secretariat which, as it had to deal with all the correspondence, soon found itself controlling the intelligence service. As an example of the absolute lack

of the very elements of military organization, it may be noted that the first demand the Secretariat set itself to supply was for maps. Of these it printed 15,000, thanks to the help of photography; but as they were based on the survey of 1852 they did not show the railways, and this essential detail was added partly from the maps taken from the enemy, partly from photo-micrographed material sent from Paris. The Secretariat organized an intelligence service, systematized the fragmentary information received from all parts of France, and gave the corps commanders daily details of the enemy's movements. A special branch presided over by a colonel was constituted to work out schemes of defence and occupied most of its time in rejecting impossible inventions.

The lack of arms was patent. Indeed there is extant a private despatch to a prefect in which Gambetta deprecates the term "levée en masse" on the ground that it would not be possible to equip a national army. He saw, however, that unless he showed himself able to organize a national defence from Tours he might as well lay down his post. Accordingly he forbade local levies and the local purchase of rifles and set to work. A special commission had already been appointed to purchase arms but was paralyzed by lack of funds. Gambetta financed the commission to such good purpose that by the end of the war it had purchased over a million rifles, 300,000 of which were *chassepots* of the imperial pattern. It is important to note that, but for the command of the sea which made these purchases possible, the provincial campaign could never have been undertaken. The domestic factories were also kept busy, but the enemy's movements did not allow production to exceed some 500 rifles a day. Nevertheless the first five army corps produced under Gambetta's organization were all equipped with *chassepots*. The supply of ammunition was a great difficulty, especially as the existing stock was almost exhausted by the middle of October. All the expert workmen were in Paris; indeed the Tours Government could only find one man who knew how to make cartridge capsules, and his factory at Bourges was scarcely started when the approach of the Prussians forced him to transfer to Toulouse. Nevertheless the weekly output of ammunition was soon running into millions. But the most extraordinary achievement was the provision of artillery. When Gambetta arrived at Tours there were perhaps 100 guns in France. There were 1400 at the end of the

war. A decree issued early in November systematized the programme which had been taken in hand a fortnight earlier. Each department was to equip within two months one battery for every 100,000 of its population. The time was deliberately made too short, but three months found 57 batteries actually in service and 41 more partly ready. The officer under whose able direction this remarkable work was accomplished was Colonel Thoumas, whom both Gambetta and Freycinet held in special affection. There was also organized a medical and ambulance service which included provision for 100,000 beds. Though composed largely of volunteers this corps soon became very efficient. Lastly, the clerical administrative staff was extended and broken up into departments as the scheme developed; it was thus able to supply the needs of the daily growing army without financial scandal.

It would, of course, have been impossible to evolve this organization out of the military personnel available at Tours. Gambetta decided at once that he could not work with the men actually at his disposal. "The retired generals of division," he wrote to the Paris Government directly after his arrival, "are targets for intense public anger which is only too well justified by their feebleness and incapacity." On the other hand much of the ablest civilian talent in France was at his disposal and he was ready enough to co-operate with men of obvious competence who were untainted by connexion with the Empire. The military felt that they deserved better treatment at his hands, but apart altogether from any question of the efficiency of individuals, public opinion made the general employment of imperial officers impossible, even before the capitulation of Metz. Gambetta himself was willing enough to use ability without asking questions, and occasionally restrained his deputy's more militant republicanism. His difficulty was that the ability was not there; three weeks' experience led him to issue the decree of 10 November, which placed all bridge, road, and mining engineers at the disposal of the War Office. The new service was largely recruited from the railways, a fact which explains both the keen interest and thorough knowledge shown by headquarters in questions of rail transport and the eventual collapse of the weakened railway administration. The pick of the men obtained were drafted into the corps of engineers which included architects, contractors, and railwaymen, and by the end of November was prepared to undertake the fortification

of Orleans. This corps astonished the Prussians by its efficiency, and its very success increased the bitterness of feeling between civilians and soldiers at headquarters. To this friction Gambetta was blind, or represented himself as blind. "The engineers and the theorists rather preponderate everywhere," he wrote to Paris in November, "but the soldiers have welcomed and appreciated their help with marvellous warmth." It was the very reverse of the truth.

While Tours was thus busy preparing to organize a national army, Gambetta was at work encouraging enthusiasm in the departments. On 14 October, he issued two important decrees which not only crushed the activity of the Leagues but contained the germ of his later and more ambitious project. The first provided for the embodiment of the National Guard as an auxiliary army; while according to the second any department which had an enemy within 100 kilometres of its borders was to establish a committee of from five to nine members under the presidency of the general officer commanding locally. This committee was to include an officer of engineers, a staff officer, a road engineer, and a mining engineer, and Gambetta impressed upon his prefects the necessity of choosing the ablest men available without thought of party politics. The defence of the department was entrusted to this committee which was empowered to press men, commandeered supplies, and dispose of the National Guards. It was also part of the committee's duty to deprive the enemy of local supplies by removing horses and cattle within defensive lines and by burning the crops. These last instructions indicate the paper strategist. It was impossible—and even if possible it would have been grossly impolitic—to lay waste all France, and in any case the Germans would have had no difficulty in bringing up supplies through a country so well provided with railways and good roads. The appointment of an inspectorate to supervise these committees completed the preliminary scheme. Field Marshal Baron von der Goltz, whose study of Gambetta's plans and acts as a war minister is written in the best tradition of military scholarship and exhibits its material with a fullness and a sympathy not to be found in any French work,¹ inclines to the view that Gambetta would have caused most embarrassment to the Germans if he had persevered on these lines. An energetic

¹ This book "Gambetta und Seine Armeen" first appeared in the "Preussische Jahrbücher" for 1874; it has been translated into French.

guerilla warfare conducted by decentralized armies, amounting altogether to some 150,000 picked men, might conceivably have compelled the enemy to raise the siege of Paris, at any rate until such time as they had called up all their reserves and thoroughly secured their communications. The experience of the British in South Africa and in Ireland shows how much mischief can be done by guerilla bands, but perhaps it is only von der Goltz's bias towards soldiers as against civilians that makes him suggest that such a plan was possible in 1870. It was impossible both for France and for Gambetta. Public opinion was aroused, and at a moment when no Frenchman felt that he could stay at home with honour it was neither feasible nor wise to damp enthusiasm by limiting numbers, nor was there any practical reason to compel such limitation. The local system of government partly improvised, partly inherited from the Empire, would meet the strain, and the wealth and resources of France could overcome all difficulties as to equipment. Above all Gambetta was himself a republican, who found his natural precedent in 1792, confirmed as it had been by the recent action of the North in the American civil war. Though he can hardly have erred so far as to compare his opponents to southern planters, he underrated their enthusiasm and capacity for sacrifice, and was too ready to attribute their success to mere superiority of organization such as patriotism could effectively counteract. It was accordingly his consistent intention to raise a gigantic army comprising all the manhood of France, which should overwhelm the scanty forces that the Germans could spare from Paris and Metz, relieve the besieged fortresses and, by a mighty demonstration of the country's latent strength, terrify the enemy into making peace. Effect was given to this intention in the series of decrees issued in the first three weeks of November. The first of them called to the colours all able-bodied men between twenty-one and forty. Gambetta, as Minister of the Interior, was to clothe, arm and drill these men and hand them over to himself as Minister of War from 19 November onwards. To train the recruits eleven instructional camps were established, each of which at first administered itself, though later on a special department was constituted to deal with camp questions. One of these camps fell into the hands of the Germans, and the Prussian officers were full of admiration for its intrenchments, which they held superior to the famous lines thrown up at Düppel by the

Danes seven years before. The organization of this army was developed in further decrees of the following week, but to the end, in spite of all his pre-occupations, Gambetta never tired of improving the details of his scheme. The last decree, which deals with remounts, bears date 25 January. Nor did he forget the effect of his scheme on the general life of the country. His prefects were empowered to give succour to families whom the mobilization decree deprived of their breadwinners. Such help, he went on to lay down in a despatch which shows he had not forgotten the warning of 1848, could best be given by means of public works, but the works undertaken should be of general utility and proper accounts must be kept. It is hardly necessary to add that the despatches include instructions for strict search to be made for any deserters returning home.

The military organization of the vast army thus projected was entrusted to a special department presided over, under Gambetta's own supervision, by Colonel Loverdo. The department was able to point to amazing results. When it came into existence it found about 40,000 regular troops divided into two armies, both beaten and in retreat, and some 30,000 National Guards stretched out along the line from Chartres to Evreux, who, badly armed and unorganized as they were, could not think of facing a Prussian attack. One hundred and twenty days later it had put into the field 230,000 infantry of the line, 32,400 cavalry, and 1400 guns, and could also dispose of 111,600 militia, a second reserve of 180,000, and 30,000 franc-tireurs. The force was divided into twelve army corps, most of them well armed, and the great bulk of them well clad and well shod. Freycinet, indeed, protests that the equipment of the troops left much to be desired, and D'Aurelle de Paladines, whose book is our main military authority on the French side for this period of the war, is full of complaints in this regard. But the German testimony is that the French army was the better equipped of the two and had an admirable transport service; and special praise is given to the construction of the captured engineering wagons. But not all the excellence of its material could compensate for the lack of training, and the defect was the more acutely felt because of the shortage of trained officers and non-commissioned officers. The imperial army had numbered 120 regiments, and should have been able to provide cadres for the training of recruits. But the imperial mobilization scheme had broken down, and the depots were

emptied to make up defective battalions, many of which appear to have taken the field with an over-complement of officers. When Gambetta started to constitute his army, 116 regimental staffs had capitulated at Sedan or were about to capitulate at Metz; and of the beggarly remnant, at least half had been concentrated in Paris. The complete absence of cadres made adequate training of the troops impossible, and Gambetta never quite realized how deeply the professional instinct of soldiers was wounded by his insistence on their making bricks without straw. Still less could he appreciate how fatally the unity and discipline of his armies in battle was prejudiced by their lack of orthodox military tradition. The difficulty was in fact insuperable, and Gambetta was perhaps too ready to assume that he had evaded it by doubling the number of men per company, by promoting men from the ranks, and by making special appointments from outside, and especially from the navy. Moreover, discipline was necessarily rather difficult to maintain with an officers' corps whose experienced elements were distrusted, and whose trusted elements were inexperienced; in this matter, however, Gambetta's military judgment was never perverted by civilian notions. He was resolute in excluding all politics from the army, and to that end maintained the rigid martial law which he had inherited from Fourichon.

Gambetta would never admit that his keen but undrilled troops were not a match for the disciplined but war-worn Germans. That would have been a confession of national inferiority. The fault, he held, was in the leadership. "What we need and need cruelly," he reported to Paris at the time when he was launching his scheme, "is a born leader of men." There was a born leader of men in Tours. Garibaldi had landed at Marseilles on 8 October, and had reached headquarters three days later. Gambetta was profoundly touched by the old warrior's zeal. But it was indisputable that he was a foreigner, and as such as little likely to be popular with the rank and file as he was certain to be hated by the generals. Gambetta was anxious to employ him, especially when he found him magnanimous on the subject of Nice, and made a happy decision in giving him command of the volunteers co-operating with the eastern army. The Prussians were eager enough to teach a lesson to the old fox, who was long past his prime and under the thumb of his pompous and quarrelsome secretary-

physician. But though Garibaldi won no fresh laurels and was unable to give any help to the eastern force, he held his own fairly well, and a detachment, under his son Ricciotto, earned glory and encouraged France by capturing the only standard taken from the enemy during the war.

Gambetta's need was for an officer to take the supreme command. Garibaldi being out of the question, he searched among the Frenchmen. Steenackers, who was intimate with him, says that he thought seriously of Bourbaki. First impressions were favourable on both sides. Gambetta was taken by Bourbaki's fine presence and gallant bearing, though he speedily came to the conclusion that the general was better fitted to lead troops in the field than to organize men for battle. Bourbaki was completely won over. "He bids the paralytics arise and walk," he said, "and behold the paralytics arise and walk." If the comment was reported to Gambetta's ears, it can scarcely have suited his anti-clerical taste. In any case Bourbaki's past—he had been A.D.C. to the Emperor, and had left Metz to negotiate with the Empress—was bound to tell against him. At his own request he was sent to the north to prove his worth by organizing the local troops. But tragedy was determined to make sport of him. Ill-luck had it that he entered Lille on the very day that the news of the fall of Metz became known. The general found himself the scape-goat of the public rage, and realizing that his position was impossible, returned to Tours and the woeful destiny that awaited him.

Gambetta's choice finally fell upon D'Aurelle de Paladines, of whom his early impression was that he was "commonplace, but strong and watchful." He had met him, he says, at Le Mans on his way to Tours, and was at once struck by his steadiness and common sense. After a month's experience of his methods Gambetta felt able to assert that D'Aurelle's wise and soldier-like bearing had been of the greatest service, and had been wonderfully successful in giving power and unity to an army composed of young troops, most of whom had never been under fire. The judgment was sound, and its very soundness proved the general unsuited to his eventual task. A soldier of the parade ground with the virtues of a drill sergeant, he was the last man in the world to lead a dash on Paris, least of all in command of troops of whose unfitness to take the field he was so painfully conscious. As a trainer of raw troops he rendered magnificent service, but he lacked all the qualities

of a fighting soldier. He was incapable of handling large bodies of men, and his own limitations made him distrustful of his subordinates. Without a vestige of strategic insight, conscious alike of his strength and of his weakness, and honourably determined to do his duty, he allowed himself to be persuaded into attempting enterprises which his own judgment condemned, but on which his irresistible civilian chief had set his heart. Politics further embittered his situation. An officer and a clerical, he was quite out of sympathy with civilian republicans, and his relations with Freycinet were strained from the first. The recruits, too, bore no initial good-will to the general to whom Napoleon had entrusted the command of the very turbulent city of Marseilles, and who had been relieved of his duties by Gambetta because of his refusal to recognize immediately the government which had succeeded the fallen Empire. Nor were their hearts at all won over when they found that their commander was as much shocked by their ribald songs as by their lack of discipline.

D'Aurelle was a sensitive man, and wounded pride turned to malice. His book is mainly an attack on Freycinet, whose own account he describes as "a long lie wherein the truth is hidden by omission and disguised by trickery." D'Aurelle was sorely tried, and bore much undeserved blame. But he was far too ready to condemn others for defects inevitable under the circumstances, and it is impossible to feel sympathy for a character so utterly devoid of any element of greatness. A routine soldier, fit only to obey, it was his misfortune to be burdened with a responsibility to which he was unequal, which he never sought, but which he had not the courage to refuse.

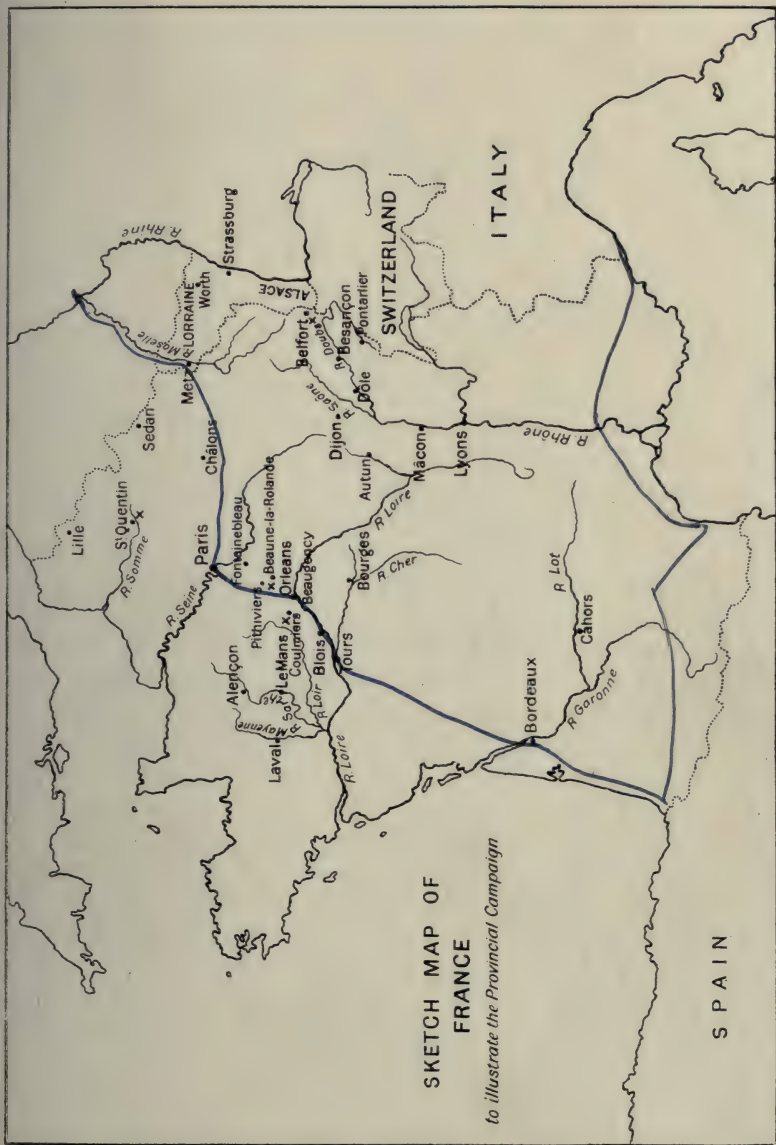
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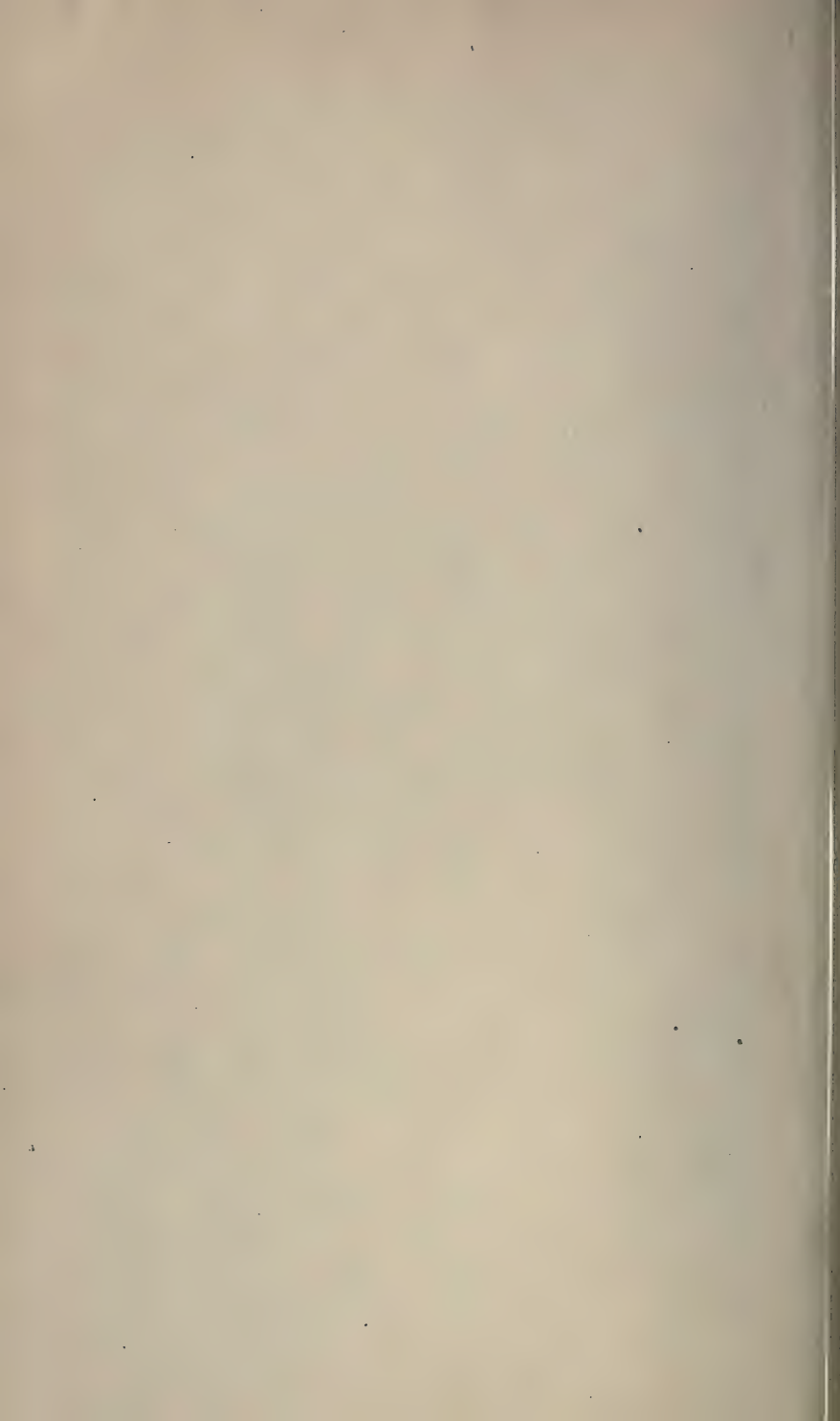
THE WINTER CAMPAIGN

THE geographical factors which controlled Gambetta's strategy were of the simplest. South of Paris the Loire runs across France and gives the line behind which, in 1870 as in the Middle Ages, resistance naturally gathered to meet invasion from the north. But the Loire does not flow due westwards. It describes a stately curve across France, its upper course inclining towards the north, its lower course towards the south. At the bend is Orleans. The possession of Orleans is thus decisive, whether for attack or for defence. To Gambetta, as to Joan of Arc, its occupation was the indispensable preliminary to a march northward. On the other hand, with Orleans in French hands, the whole Loire valley was safe. The force at the bend could attack the rear of any German corps thrusting down towards the river, whether to the east or to the west. Accordingly, as soon as the military exertions of the Tours delegation began to bear fruit, the Germans proposed to nullify them by seizing Orleans; and the French were forced out of the town and across the river two days after Gambetta arrived and took control.

The line of the Rhone runs at right angles to the line of the Loire, but the frontiers of France, as they were traced at the outbreak of the war, rendered any defence of its valley superfluous. So far as it was not covered by the neutral state of Switzerland, it was protected by the line of the upper Rhine. With the invasion of Alsace, however, this protection had ceased to exist, and a few troops, grandiloquently styled the army of the east, had been placed in the Vosges to calm the apprehensions of Lyons and Marseilles. On the day Gambetta reached Tours the Germans delivered a successful attack on this army, which began to fall back on Besançon.

The situation confronting Gambetta was thus sufficiently alarming. Not only did he find himself at once deprived of the





bridge-head whose occupation was essential to any move for the relief of Paris, but the German advance in the east threatened the whole country behind him. The great soldier, they say, is surprised at nothing in war. But had Moltke been told on 10 October that an inexperienced politician, without an administration or a treasury, without an army or fortified bases, was about to challenge the German Higher Command, with all the resources, military, political, and moral at its disposal, he might have spared one of his rare smiles for the preposterous suggestion. On the face of it the latest German moves had doubly ruined the prospects of the Tours delegation. The capture of Orleans opened the road to the emergency capital. The advance through the Vosges gave fresh impetus to schemes for purely regional defence. Nevertheless the challenge was delivered with such effect that it caused the German army heavy losses, and filled the German staff with anxiety. There could indeed be no higher compliment to Gambetta's achievement than was paid by Bismarck when he used all his diplomatic skill to exclude him both from any share in the negotiations for the final armistice and from any benefit under its terms. Even after the fall of Paris no loophole was to be left to the man who within three weeks had reconstituted the national defence in defiance of the military and political obstacles prepared for him, and had tempered the spirit of his countrymen to be proof against the surrender of Metz.

The winter campaign was undertaken with the single object of relaxing the German grip on Paris. It fell, however, into four phases. In the first phase the French attempted a direct offensive. The movement began on 7 November, when D'Aurelle opened the operation which was to recover Orleans, but a further advance in the direction of Fontainebleau was decisively checked, and the definite failure of the French effort was marked by the second evacuation of Orleans just before midnight on 4 December. The Germans now passed to the offensive in their turn. This stage of the campaign opened on 8 December, when the Government admitted the danger by abandoning Tours and falling back to Bordeaux. But the French resistance was obstinate, and it was not until 19 January that German cavalry rode into Gambetta's deserted headquarters.

Meanwhile a diversion had been attempted towards the east.

The forward movement, which aimed at relieving Belfort and at cutting the enemy's communications, opened on 9 January, and continued for nine days. On 20 January the tide began to turn, and the eastern army was hopelessly compromised when Paris surrendered on the 28th, but it was not until three days later that the disorganized French troops found safety by crossing the Swiss frontier.

Almost simultaneously a force in the north sought to reach Paris by a movement down the Somme. The French offensive opened on 10 January, and was turned into a retreat by the defeat at St Quentin on the 19th.

All these operations are of great interest to military historians. Their strategy is impressive and their tactical lessons of high importance. In battle, the raw recruits who formed the army of the Loire were to show themselves a match for the troops whose victories a few weeks before were to overawe Europe for more than a generation. On the other hand, these same soldiers who distinguished themselves in action were incapable either of clinching a victory or of rallying from defeat. The campaign thus illustrates—and perhaps more clearly than any other campaign of modern times—both the virtues and the limitations of that cardinal military quality, discipline. A full narrative of its events would be out of place here, but Gambetta's personal influence on both strategy and tactics was so persistent and so marked that an account of the part he played must needs illuminate the wider military issues involved.

Gambetta kept his head and his nerve in face of his immediate difficulties. The newly formed 15th corps, which had evacuated Orleans, had withdrawn in tolerable order behind the bend of the Loire. Gambetta at once handed it over to D'Aurelle, much to the disgust of its former commander, de la Motterouge, who protested against his undeserved supersession by a war minister who had fallen from a balloon. But D'Aurelle had been given the work for which he was suited. He spent the next ten days—the happiest he was to experience during his tenure of the command—in putting his troops through a most strenuous course of drill. The rapid recovery of the 15th corps was in itself some protection for Tours, but Gambetta removed all risks of a German raid by placing at Blois the few battalions which formed the nucleus of the future 16th corps. The commander was Chanzy, soon to become Gambetta's most trusted military colleague.

By 15 October Tours was safe, and Gambetta left for Besançon. His departure had become imperative, for the re-establishment of some sort of protection for the Rhone valley was essential to his policy of abolishing the regional leagues. He stayed two days at Besançon, where he showed for the first time his marvellous power of rallying dispirited troops. In those two days he turned a disorganized mass of men into a field force covering the main approach to Lyons. With this achievement he was satisfied, being well aware that the Germans, of whose two main armies one was round Metz and the other round Paris, had no army of manœuvre to spare for an adventure into the heart of France. The reorganization did not cover the upper Saône valley where a weak force of the enemy was already operating and was soon to instal itself at Dijon. But this route led less directly to the Rhone valley, and Gambetta decided that a small force would suffice to close it. The situation gave him his chance to find suitable employment for Garibaldi. The old warrior was placed at Autun in command of some 15,000 volunteers. The appointment satisfied Garibaldi's condition that he should be left entirely independent, and Gambetta was evidently well pleased with the arrangement. Friction with French officials arose in due course, and was smoothed away in a charming letter from Bordeaux, for which Garibaldi returned grateful thanks. But no similar indulgence was shown to his officious chief of staff, Bordone, whom Gambetta once sharply called to order for the objectionable tone of his despatches.

At Besançon Gambetta found Bourbaki full of zeal and hope. He propounded a big bold scheme for an eastward march which would relieve Metz. Bazaine, himself freed, would free Paris, recapturing Sedan on the way. But Gambetta was under no illusions as to the true quality of the troops among whom he was labouring, and realized that nothing could be done for at least a fortnight. Besides he must consult D'Aurelle whom he had already destined for the supreme command. But he took the idea back with him to Tours, and though the lapse of another week convinced him that it had been brought forward too late to save Metz, he was to recur to it later on.

On 24 October Freycinet met D'Aurelle and his colleagues at Salbris, and two days later a conference was held at Tours under Gambetta's presidency to determine the plan of campaign. D'Aurelle was already urgent with the pleas, with which his

civilian colleagues soon became exasperatingly familiar, that his troops were not yet fit to fight and that the bad weather made the roads impassable. But Gambetta was clear that the campaign could not wait. The army was increasing daily—D'Aurelle's own corps was now swollen to some 60,000 men—and would lose its heart if kept in idleness. Moreover, Paris was clamouring for relief. In a despatch recently to hand Favre had urged that the state of feeling in the capital made it important that the Loire army should move not later than 6 November. With this to spur him on, and with a better appreciation than D'Aurelle of the way to handle an army of civilians, Gambetta pressed for an immediate advance on Orleans. He was content to carry his point, but would have been better advised to supersede a commander whose heart was obviously not in the business. But loyalty to the soldier whose preliminary work had been so excellent, and a desire to prove in this conspicuous case that his patriotism knew nothing of politics, were stronger than his military judgment. In the event D'Aurelle found an adequate excuse for postponing action to which he was opposed. The news from Metz came through before the attack could be launched, and the general rightly refused to call upon his troops to fight while still under the first shock of the disaster.

Gambetta announced the capitulation in a proclamation written, as M. Reinach says, in words of burning lava. Calling upon his countrymen to steel their souls, he told them that Bazaine had played the traitor. The accomplice of the man of Sedan had foully surrendered to the enemy his troops, his wounded, his stores, his guns, his standards, and the strongest fortress of France, Metz, never before polluted by a foreign conqueror. In a second proclamation, addressed to the army, Gambetta attributed the disaster to the treachery of the command, while assuring the troops that they were now under leaders who deserved their confidence. This language caused bitter and not unnatural indignation among the officers who saw their comrades vilified by the head of the Government which they were themselves seeking to serve. Fourichon refused to sign the objectionable document. Even Thoumas, the head of the artillery department, called on Gambetta to protest. Gambetta saw him and, as Thoumas records in his memoirs, not only soothed him down but won his heart. Unfortunately Gambetta did not see D'Aurelle, whose military

pride was deeply wounded and who feared that the proclamation would have the worst effect on the discipline of his men. But the objections of officers of the old imperial army did not disturb Gambetta. His aim was to negative the moral effect of the news on France, and he was able to assure his colleagues in Paris that his language had satisfied opinion in the country and had calmed the apprehensions of the troops. Addresses of confidence poured into Tours. One came across the Atlantic from Frenchmen settled in California. Another was from the younger teachers of the *lycée* of Poitiers, who requested the Minister, in language whose turn must have pleased him, not to rule that their professional duties deprived them of their right to bear arms. But the address which moved him most was one of the last to come. Six weeks later Gambetta received a touching message of thanks and hope from French privates, prisoners at Bonn.

The attack whose postponement had greatly disappointed Gambetta was further delayed by the persistent reports that Paris was negotiating an armistice. At last, on 4 November, Freycinet lost patience and wrote to Gambetta for a definite ruling. Everything was held up because no one knew whether Paris meant peace or war, and meanwhile D'Aurelle was leaving it to the Prussians to attack him at their convenience. The army must either advance or retreat according to the policy. What was the policy? Gambetta replied in very vigorous terms. "I share the anxiety with which you view the Government's deplorable tactics. Their obvious effect is to disorganize our plans and to weaken the spirit of our troops and of their leaders. We must counter by redoubling our efforts. I do not know whether the Paris Government is inclined to negotiate. I only know that my mission and my duty is to fight to the death."

This letter had its effect and the attack was begun on 7 November; but ten precious days had been lost and the army that had besieged Metz was well on its way across France. But it was not yet in a position to influence events, and on 9 November the French gained the one incontestable victory which graced their arms during the campaign. The plan of operations was that D'Aurelle should move straight on Orleans from the south with Chanzy supporting him from the southwest. The move resulted in heavy fighting to the west of the town, especially round the village of Coulmiers, from which

the battle takes its name. The Germans were surprised, outnumbered and defeated, but their commander escaped the envelopment planned for him and withdrew in safety to the north. On the following day the French re-entered Orleans.¹

Tours was in hopes of an immediate pursuit of the enemy, and hugged visions of the relief of Paris before Frederick Charles came up from Metz. But D'Aurelle made no move, and on the 12th a further council of war was held. D'Aurelle appears to have spoken strongly. He insisted, with complete truth, that the half-trained troops had been unable to reform after the action, and that with such material a vigorous pursuit was impossible. His victory had, in fact, made him more apprehensive than ever. Frederick Charles was on the march, and in D'Aurelle's view would at once attack the new French field army, now that it had shown itself capable of effective action. So far, therefore, from countenancing the occupation of further ground, he proposed that the army should be re-united and concentrated behind the Loire, there to await the enemy in a selected and entrenched position.

The evil consequences of the retention of D'Aurelle in his command were now apparent. A man of Chanzy's temperament was required, who would run risks and put his whole soul into re-forming his troops for a fresh advance. But it was now out of the question to supersede D'Aurelle. The prestige of victory was upon him and he had, indeed, just been nominated commander-in-chief of the army of the Loire. Finding it impossible to work either with him or without him, Gambetta essayed to loosen the deadlock by a compromise. The army was to remain north of the Loire, but was to be put through a course of training in the great entrenched camp which D'Aurelle at once began to construct near Orleans.

It is part of the tragedy which attended all the French efforts in this campaign that this compromise was not effectively adhered to. Conditions in Paris were such that the relief movement could have waited until the beginning of the following month. The Loire army would have been infinitely the better for its training and D'Aurelle would have seen his error in regard to Frederick Charles' further plans. As Gambetta realized, the

¹ It is a serious blot on von der Goltz's book that sooner than record this German defeat in detail, he opens his main narrative after the recovery of Orleans. This is most unfair to Gambetta, but for whom the operation would never have been attempted.

conquerors of Metz had no ambition for further glory and no zest for further fighting. Their desire was for a peace which would confirm their victory. Moreover, the Germans had nothing to gain by attacking Orleans. The Loire army could not threaten to deprive them of their one remaining military objective, Paris, so long as it was content to remain stationary ; and D'Aurelle's fortifications would soon relieve them of all anxiety as to his intentions. On the other hand, nothing would so seriously weaken the German will to victory as an attempt at the earliest possible moment to reap the neglected fruits of the victory of Coulmiers. In this view Gambetta was right and another circumstance increased his ardour for instant action. He had been lamentably misinformed about the position in Paris. His October news was that it could not hold out after the end of November ; that month was well advanced before he learnt that the date of the inevitable capitulation had been advanced to 15 December ; and it was not until December that it was again postponed until the end of the year. In fact, however, Paris did not surrender till 28 January. This miscalculation for which Gambetta, of course, bears no responsibility, ruined his plan of campaign and caused him to dissipate, in a series of disconnected movements, forces which should have been held back for one concerted effort.

In accepting the compromise, therefore, Gambetta's thought was to pacify D'Aurelle. His real intentions were revealed in a proclamation to the troops whom he saluted as having taken the first step on the road to Paris, and whom he bade remember that the starving city was awaiting the men who owed it to their honour to free her from the enemy's savage grip. It was at this time that he and Freycinet must first have considered the scheme, which they afterwards put into operation, for confining D'Aurelle's authority to Orleans itself and for taking the forces on either flank under their own direct control. Von der Goltz, as a soldier, holds that their action was disastrous to France, and attributes it to the Gallic passion for centralization. Disastrous it may have been, but its adoption was due, not to theories of government but to force of circumstances. A move had to be made and D'Aurelle would not make it. What else could Gambetta do but make it himself ?

For a week, however, he kept his patience, and strove to shake D'Aurelle out of his Fabian attitude. Let him at least harry the Germans by sending columns out to the north of

Orleans. But D'Aurelle kept his men at work in their camp until on the 19th he was peremptorily ordered to make his plans for a march on Paris and a junction with Trochu. Now Trochu had complained of the lack of information which would have enabled him to offer some support to the operations for the recovery of Orleans. Taking advantage of his protest, D'Aurelle replied that he must know Trochu's plans before he could frame his own. At this Gambetta fairly lost his temper. Trochu knew that the army was at Orleans, and could therefore be in no doubt as to the route of its relieving march. All he needed to be told was the date of the advance. It was this episode which finally ruptured the good relations between the minister and the commander-in-chief.

A week had been lost. The delay occasioned further delay, for it was certain that Frederick Charles' army was now approaching, and that its arrival would compel the French to throw more men into their attack. Another week would make three, perhaps four, new army corps available. Meanwhile the situation to the west of Orleans required attention. A force under the Duke of Mecklenburg was moving down from the north. Its advance would threaten both Le Mans, where troops were concentrating, and Tours itself. Chanzy, who commanded in the western area, was all for heartening the spirit of his troops by an attack on the Germans, but the cautious D'Aurelle, always apprehensive of Frederick Charles and alarmed at the effect of the bad weather on his sick list, advised retreat towards Orleans. Gambetta decided to deal with the situation on the spot, but he was still busy perfecting his plans for a move on the eastern flank and it was not until the 22nd that he left for Le Mans. There he spent three vigorous and successful days. He found the troops demoralized by the reports of the Duke of Mecklenburg's advance, but with the aid of their new commander, Jaurès, an able naval officer who had just taken up his duties, he gave them new heart and a proper organization. On the 25th he returned to Tours, leaving a trustworthy and confident corps behind him. Meanwhile Freycinet had been in charge, and on 23 November had ordered the powerful forces to the east of Orleans to test Frederick Charles' strength. Fighting, which was particularly severe in the neighbourhood of Beaune-la-Rolande, took place on the two following days. The French gained a little ground, but were without instructions which would have enabled them to follow up any success.

Gambetta himself took a hand in these operations, telegraphing direct to the corps commanders, who thus sometimes received contradictory orders.¹

The slight naturally angered D'Aurelle. As soon as he heard of the scheme he telegraphed his protests, urging the bad weather and the numbers of the enemy. He received a provocative reply. The Prussians would never become fewer, and the weather would not improve for three or four months. Of course the operation had its risks. But if D'Aurelle disliked it let him come forward with a better plan, or indeed with any plan. D'Aurelle complains in his book that Tours was always urging him to do something. The trouble was that he required urging. He had been appointed to do something, and should have resigned if he felt unable to comply with the terms of his appointment. Stung to action at last, he resolved to take the offensive, and asked, properly enough, for the troops on the right wing to be placed under his control. Freycinet, who now had a decree superseding D'Aurelle in his pocket, refused the request. This absence of co-operation between the right and the centre was the main cause of the failure of the renewed attack on 28 November, and the ultimate responsibility attaches to Gambetta, whose decree had, in effect, placed the supreme authority in commission. The right wing attempted a great outflanking movement round Frederick Charles' army, and should have been supported from Orleans. In the event it fought unassisted, and was held. The fighting was most determined and cost the 10th German corps very heavy losses. Before the day was over the commander had put his last reserves into the field. But the German line stood firm, and Frederick Charles drew the important conclusion that no further danger was to be feared from the two French corps, disorganized as they were by the confusion inevitable on the battle-field. He therefore decided to move the bulk of his forces to the other side of the theatre of war, in the hope of thrusting in between the French troops loosely strung out

¹ In any case, however, the operation was foredoomed to failure. By a grave error of judgment Freycinet had sent out an Irish adventurer named Ogilvy to act as his commissioner on the spot. He soon realized his error and telegraphed that the man was to be excluded from all councils of war. But irreparable mischief had been done. Wandering about with the whole French plan of attack in his pocket, Ogilvy was shot by the Germans, who possessed themselves of his papers in the nick of time to act on the information they contained.

between Orleans and Le Mans. Warned of his move, D'Aurelle threw out troops from Orleans to strengthen his left. The French right was thus left somewhat in the air, incapable of exercising any effective further influence on events even if it had been able to move again.

Such was the situation when news of the utmost moment arrived at Tours. Impressed by the failure of the Loire army to advance after Coulmiers, Trochu concluded that it needed support, and resolved to make a sortie. The date of his choice was 29 November, and a despatch announcing his intention was sent out by balloon on the 24th. But the balloon was carried to Norway, and the news did not reach Tours until the 30th. "For so vital a matter only one balloon!" as Gambetta reproachfully wrote to his colleagues in Paris. That night a council of war was held at Tours. D'Aurelle was still sore at Freycinet's behaviour, and his nerves had been further rasped by Crémieux' and Glais-Bizoin's visit to Orleans the previous day. But in this crisis he behaved like the honourable soldier that he was. The army must attack again at once, and on 1 December D'Aurelle issued an order definitely committing it to a march on Paris. On that day the news of the sortie reached Tours, and Gambetta, whom the misreading of a place-name had led to suppose that the French had broken through the enemy lines, allowed himself a few minutes' break in his office work and made a speech to the people, extolling the victory of the republican arms. His spirits overflowed in optimistic circulars. The hour is critical, he wrote to Paris, and the country stirred to its depth.

The plan was that the right and left wings should conduct simultaneous flanking movements converging on Pithiviers, half-way to Fontainebleau. The right wing was, in fact, immobile, but the left under Chanzy began its advance on 1 December, and gained considerable ground. On the following day, however, Chanzy came into contact with the strong forces which the Germans had begun to drive into the gap between himself and D'Aurelle. His centre was more than held, his right was driven in. The half-trained French troops were in no state to rally, and D'Aurelle was not the man to attempt the impossible. He ordered an immediate retreat and late on the 3rd telegraphed that Orleans could not be held. He had brought about the fulfilment of his own worst fears. Frederick Charles had appreciated the circumstances, and had

resolved to destroy all co-operation between the French wings by marching straight on the weakened centre.

Gambetta was horrified at the news. Angry telegrams were exchanged with D'Aurelle. Evacuate Orleans to avoid disaster? Why, to evacuate Orleans would itself be a disaster. Use the right wing and fight on. But D'Aurelle knew what Gambetta would not realize, that there was no fight left in the right wing, and insisted that Orleans must fall on the 4th or 5th. Tours sorrowfully acquiesced. At noon next day, however, D'Aurelle telegraphed that he would hold on. The news that the 15th corps, which he believed to be in a fit state to fight, was marching into the town, had induced him to alter his decision. At three o'clock Gambetta left for Orleans to rally the troops. But the 15th corps was hopelessly demoralized. Instead of occupying the entrenchments, the men dispersed in disorder through the streets. At 5.15 D'Aurelle telegraphed that he must evacuate, and opened negotiations with the Germans, whose troops entered just before midnight. Gambetta, held up for hours in the congested railway traffic at Beaugency, burst into tears when he heard the fatal news. At 3 a.m. he arrived back in Tours, riding on the footplate of a locomotive. It had been an adventurous journey, for the engine's sides bore the marks of many German bullets.

Gambetta at once superseded D'Aurelle. It was to his "outrageous incompetence," he told Paris, that the defeat was due, and he reproached the unfortunate general for his failure to concentrate his troops, and so enable them to meet the German attack. The reproach was unfair. The dispersion of the troops was not the fault of D'Aurelle, whose request to control them had been refused. But the first hasty decision to abandon Orleans was indefensible. A leader of men would have resolved to make a stand and would have at once invoked Gambetta's invaluable aid in rallying broken troops.

The loss of Orleans brought Gambetta near despair. He received the news, he told Paris, with a stupefaction blended with sorrow and anger—but indeed his pen could not do justice to his feelings during the miserable hours through which he had just passed. "What a dereliction of duty in face of the enemy! What utter and miserable forgetfulness of a soldier's first business!" No wonder the enemies of the Republic were jubilant. But he would make front against the storm, would

never allow the iron to enter his soul, had, indeed, already given orders for a new concentration. If Paris could not be relieved, it could still hope to be re-provisioned under an armistice leading to free elections from which corrupt Bonapartist influence would be excluded ; for the enemy was at his last gasp, and the duty of the Government was to continue to hold aloft with firm hands the glorious flag of republican France.

The new concentration, for which Gambetta had so promptly given orders, broke up the army of the Loire into two forces, each under an independent commander-in-chief. Chanzy remained at the head of the left wing, which now became the second army of the Loire. The old right wing, now withdrawn across the river, together with the disorganized 15th corps, which had fallen back from Orleans on Bourges, was placed under Bourbaki. The plan had both military and political advantages. The constant arrival of fresh drafts was swelling the army to an unwieldy size ; and the fact that the raw troops required to be encouraged by the frequent sight of their general set a limit to the force which one man could effectively control. Moreover French opinion needed strengthening after the fresh disappointment, and how could Gambetta strengthen it more dramatically than by exhibiting two armies already in being to renew the effort which had proved beyond the power of one ? To gain his effect Gambetta sent encouraging messages all over France. The unhappy D'Aurelle was made the scapegoat, and French opinion could hardly be blamed for concluding that it was a second Bazaine who had involved the army of the Loire in disaster.

Chanzy's army took up a strong position north of the river, on which its right wing rested, facing Orleans and covering Tours. On this line it withstood for four days, 7 to 11 December, the shock of determined German attacks. During these four days, which were entirely honourable to French arms, the Government moved to Bordeaux, but Gambetta himself remained with Chanzy, and formed of him the exalted opinion in which he never afterwards wavered. In Chanzy, he wrote to his Paris colleagues, he had found a true master of the art of war, who would yet save France. The praise was too high, but Chanzy, if no soldier of genius, was emphatically the right man in the right place. Paris held his thoughts. The army of the Loire had been formed to save

Paris ; it was wasting its energies unless it was planning and attempting an advance on Paris ; and if it had to give ground, it must move to the north-west instead of to the south, so that at least it should not turn its back on Paris. The retreat to the west actually took place, and was, of course, fatal to any prospect of junction with Bourbaki's force. Chanzy's defence of his strategy, as he urged it on Gambetta at the time, and as he justified it later in his vigorous book, is summed up in the one word—Paris.

Chanzy's force had shown that it could repel frontal attacks, but its position would be hopelessly compromised if the Germans crossed the river at Orleans and advanced down its southern bank. Gambetta's plans assumed that Bourbaki's army, two corps of which had seen no fighting since 28 November, would see to it that the Germans did not leave Orleans. But Bourbaki remained inactive, and Frederick Charles at Orleans was quick to seize his chance. At Blois Gambetta himself was able to impose some delay on his movements. The Germans had threatened to bombard the town unless its inhabitants themselves repaired the bridge across the Loire. The terrified populace were about to yield, when in the nick of time Gambetta appeared and heartened them to defy the enemy to do his worst. The Germans carried out their threat, but did not do serious damage to the town, possibly because they were themselves busy with the repair of the bridge. Their advance was quickly resumed.

By the afternoon of the 11th Chanzy's right was threatened, and an immediate retreat became necessary. The French general had appreciated the quality of his army. He knew that the troops could stand but could not move, and that the retreat would end in disaster unless the pressure were relieved. Indeed by the following day the retiring army had begun to go to pieces under the icy rain, and the roads to Le Mans were already littered with abandoned equipment. On the 12th, Gambetta left for Bourges to ascertain for himself the causes of Bourbaki's inactivity.

The appointment of Bourbaki to his command had been made and was upheld by Gambetta in spite of the strong objections raised both by Freycinet and by the general himself. A dour republican, Freycinet could have no confidence in a soldier who had clung to the Empire after Sedan. So long as Gambetta was still with Chanzy the question could be regarded

as open, and Freycinet expressed his views in an emphatic telegram from Bordeaux. But when the minister went to Bourges and thence reported his full satisfaction with his choice, the delegate could only acquiesce, though with the grudging comment that a different decision would have been reached had he himself been sent to judge the situation on the spot. It is merely an apparent paradox to cite these telegrams as evidence of the harmony with which the two men worked together; only fast friends between whom misunderstanding was impossible could have agreed to differ with such outspoken frankness.

Bourbaki was equally conscious of his own unsuitability. He felt that his sense of public duty was placing him in an impossibly false position. By accepting a high command under the Republic he estranged himself from his imperialist friends, while he failed to win the confidence of his new subordinates. As he put it himself, if it rained or snowed, they would accuse their general of treachery. But Bourbaki's frank and manly bearing made a marked impression on Gambetta, whose conviction that he would prove an inspiring leader of troops in action was to be justified by the event. He felt, too, a certain sympathy with Bourbaki's masterful temperament, which made him gather up all the threads of administration into his own hands. There seems therefore no ground for the suggestion conveyed in Freycinet's book that Gambetta only retained Bourbaki because he hesitated to dismiss two generals within a week. Maybe there was at first in contemplation some arrangement whereby Bourbaki would lead in the field, while strategic control would rest with Garibaldi, whose claims Freycinet was persistent in urging, but whom French soldiers would never tolerate as their actual commander-in-chief. In the event, however, no formal restriction of Bourbaki's authority was mooted, his vigour in action being held to offset his despondency in council; so that Gambetta's insistence on his appointment finally committed him to his tragic destiny.

Arrived at Bourges, Gambetta at once perceived that the three corps from which he had expected so much had lost all semblance of an army. It was, he told his colleagues in Bordeaux, the saddest sight he had come across. He immediately gave up all hope of another move on Fontainebleau. The utmost that could be attempted was a diversion towards Orleans which would draw off Frederick Charles' attention

from Chanzy. Gambetta therefore fell back, for the further programme of the army, on Bourbaki's old plan of a march eastward, overruled Chanzy's objection that the two forces should work their way north simultaneously, and instructed Freycinet to submit details. Meanwhile he threw himself heart and soul into the congenial work of reorganization. It is characteristic of him that he should have apologized to Bordeaux for having no substantial results to point to within twenty-four hours. But first, he explained, he had to put a little heart into everybody. The process involved a multitude of new appointments. Their effect was apparent on the 14th, when the essential diversion was made, and Chanzy, at last safe, was able to begin building up a new army at Le Mans. By the 15th, Gambetta's invincible optimism had reasserted itself. Bordeaux was advised of a splendid force, with the right men at the head of it—all young and full of zeal. "We are going on grandly." Next day, the army, whose material losses had after all been very slight, was reported to want nothing but the good opinion of itself which decent weather would be enough to induce. Meanwhile the men were in billets and could keep snug. By the 20th, the reorganization was pronounced almost complete. On the previous day Gambetta had approved the plan of transporting two army corps by rail to Besançon. Train transport had worked successfully early in the war, but the lines were now congested with supplies, and the railway companies had given the pick of their men to Gambetta's favourite corps of engineers. The move was badly made. Gambetta stormed at the railway companies and, after a flying visit to Chanzy, left for Lyons to stir the officials to action and to arrange a plan of co-operation with Garibaldi. His presence at Lyons was necessary in any case. A republican officer had been murdered in the streets, and Challemel-Lacour apprehended a communist outbreak. Gambetta, who believed that Bonapartist gold had contrived the outrage, himself feared a junction between the revolutionaries and the reactionaries, though to his colleagues he pooh-poohed the affair as "a little effervescence." Nothing untoward occurred, but the episode was not without its effect on the moral of the 24th corps then forming at Lyons.

In these closing days of December Gambetta's burden was at its heaviest. Red tape at Besançon was clogging the activities of the fighting departments. Chanzy, Bourbaki, Garibaldi, Challemel-Lacour, all brought their special difficulties to be

solved; and to crown all there occurred a heavy fall of snow which, according to his own avowal, crushed his hopes. His despair must have been momentary, for while his gloomy telegram was on its way to Bordeaux, he was hard at it recruiting voluntary labour to clear the twelve inches of snow off the blocked lines. The snow finally broke down the transport arrangements. The move took a fortnight to complete. Trains were held up for hours and even for days. The regimental officers dared not detrain and bivouac their troops, for the journey might be resumed at any moment; meanwhile their men drank absinthe and forgot their discipline. When Bourbaki at last began his movement on 5 January, bodies of troops were still scattered along the railway lines between Bourges and Besançon. Moreover the defective traffic management left the general full of anxiety for his supplies. The commissariat was indeed on the verge of a breakdown throughout the operations. Bourbaki has been blamed for concentrating his men so closely; but their quality made it impossible for him to thin his lines.

The army struck to the north-east to relieve Belfort. Its first attack, on 9 January, was successful, and Werder, the German commander, withdrew his forces behind the river Lisaine which covered the approach to the fortress. His retreat freed Dijon, and Garibaldi at once reoccupied the town with the intention of securing Bourbaki's left. But another six days elapsed before the French had re-formed for a further attack. Meanwhile Werder had consolidated his position. From the 15th to the 18th, the French, undaunted by eighteen degrees of frost, flung themselves at his entrenchments and in one sector penetrated to within five miles of Belfort. But their attacks lacked cohesion and finally broke down under the fire of the siege guns which the Germans had rushed up. The dash to the east had failed and Bourbaki resolved to fall back on Besançon.

With Gambetta beside him to spur him on, Bourbaki might have accomplished in forty-eight hours the second concentration over which he actually spent those six fatal days. But Gambetta had no energies to spare for the eastern enterprise, regarding it merely as a huge diversion which would attain its object if it withdrew the Germans' attention from a last attempt to relieve Paris. After a strenuous fortnight at Le Mans, Chanzy reported that his army was again in fettle. But the Government refused to sanction an immediate advance. Let

Chanzy wait another ten days or so, by which time fresh troops would be at his disposal and the Germans would be busy with Bourbaki. But the Germans had their own plan for dealing with the situation. The French intentions in the east were still obscure, but at least they could see to it that Chanzy's force was kept in proper check. Accordingly the French preparations for their coming advance were still in progress when, on 6 January, Chanzy's troops began to feel the pressure of the German army concentrated against them. There followed five days of terrible fighting. The appalling weather, alternate frosts and thaws, put the severest strain on the troops. But the Germans, being better disciplined, were the more mobile. On the 11th, they got round the French right and the whole army broke. Chanzy still clung to Paris and proposed to move north-west to Alençon so as to remain within striking distance of the capital. But the army of the Loire was Gambetta's best hope and might soon, as he feared, become his only hope. Besides, he came to realize the limitations of his military instrument. In a despatch to Paris he compared it acutely enough to "a machine over-hastily constructed and put together. It can only work for a few days on end and stands in need of almost continuous overhauls." Rather than break down the emergency machine, Gambetta resolved to give it a thorough rest. He ordered a retirement due west, and on 19 January he joined Chanzy at Laval behind the Mayenne. There with unabated energy he laboured to reconstitute the shattered troops, carrying at the same time the whole war machine on his own back, for both Chanzy and Freycinet were down with influenza. But the position of Paris was now desperate, and on the 22nd he left for Lille to see whether there was any hope of succour from the north.

The national defence in the north had been conducted with a zeal which had hitherto made Gambetta's intervention superfluous. The troops were led by a keen and able general, Faidherbe, who had worked in perfect harmony with the civil commissioner, Testelin, Gambetta's nominee and a man altogether after his own heart. But there was no spirit left in the north now. The attempt to force a way into the Somme valley, timed to synchronize with the movement of the other French armies, had definitely failed on the 19th. Faidherbe stated that half his troops were useless, and expressed his agreeable surprise at having been able to conduct any sort of a retreat.

Even Testelin, overcome by the despondency which had settled on the civil population, hinted at the need for peace. Gambetta got no comfort from his visit to Lille, and returned to his headquarters at Bordeaux, there to make ready the further outburst of energy with which he proposed to meet the fall of Paris. The shock of the disaster would, he thought, again fire France as the fall of Metz had fired her three months before.

Bad news from the east awaited him. Bourbaki had planned to fall back on his base, Besançon, holding off the enemy as he retired. But Besançon was no longer safe. From the 20th to the 24th, Garibaldi's miscellaneous forces—the general himself was lying ill at Dijon—was harassed by constant attacks¹ under cover of which a German army slipped past him and occupied Dôle. The enemy were thus astride of Bourbaki's best line of communications with Lyons. But the mountain roads through the Jura remained open and supplies could still be forwarded by rail to Pontarlier. Bourbaki struggled manfully with a situation serious but not desperate. He faced round with his back to the mountains and Switzerland. If his right but held the Germans on the Lisaine, he might yet make front against the new attack and recover touch with Garibaldi. The right gave. Bourbaki's nerve gave with it. "The enterprise is beyond my powers," he telegraphed, adding the pitiful detail that the raw troops from Lyons bolted when they heard a shot fired. To avoid another Sedan he resolved to direct his army into Switzerland.

Gambetta, at Bordeaux, busy with the despatch of the reinforcements which enabled Garibaldi to recover Dôle, could not credit the news. "The more I reflect on your plan of marching on Pontarlier," he telegraphed, "the less I understand it. Is there not a mistake in the name? Do you really mean Pontarlier—Pontarlier on the Swiss frontier?" The unhappy general saw his men start off up the ice-covered Jura roads, with misery, as von der Goltz's picturesque phrase has it, in every fold of their red trousers, and turned his revolver on himself.

But Gambetta's cup was not yet full. He had still to learn the news of the capitulation which he had awaited for at least a fortnight. On the 13th, he had told Paris how it might be possible to pluck fresh strength out of the heart of disaster. The besieged army must break out, break out at once, break out at

¹ It was during one of these attacks that Ricciotto Garibaldi captured a German standard.

any cost, break out in as great a force as might be and without hope of return. Whatever troops cut their way through would be incorporated in Chanzy's army, which would continue the struggle in the west. A few days later he begged his colleagues not to be demoralized by the thought of imminent catastrophe, and on the 27th he reviewed the situation in a long despatch. Neither its circumstances nor its status, he held, would justify the Government of the Hotel de Ville in treating in the name of France. Its members could only make terms for Paris and as the representatives of Paris. They must bear in mind that it was Paris, not France, which was forced to surrender. The Bordeaux Government could and would continue the struggle in the name of France. The position was certainly gloomy. But there was no need to lose heart. He was himself as convinced as ever that the fortune of war could be restored by prolonging it until the enemy was utterly exhausted. The despatch arrived too late, and would have been futile even if it had arrived in time. While Gambetta was writing it Bismarck was imposing terms carefully drafted, though Favre did not know it, so as to make any prolongation of the war impossible. When the news came that Paris had capitulated in the name of France, Gambetta received it with an outburst of temper. For the moment, says Thoumas who was with him at the time, he thought of denouncing the armistice, cancelling the elections, proclaiming himself dictator, and so continuing the war. Might not Garibaldi in Auvergne and Chanzy in Brittany hold out till the crack of doom? But his friends reasoned with him, and presently he thanked them in broken tones, shook hands with them all, and resigned. A few hours later his unquenchable hope had again mastered him. He would carry on. The elections would return an Assembly resolute that France should perish utterly rather than suffer the shame of dismemberment. In this spirit he issued yet another proclamation—a trumpet call to arms which could no longer stir despondent hearts. But Gambetta would not admit that the spirit of France had waxed faint. Besides, the situation had one element of good cheer. The armistice would save the eastern army. Ignorant of the facts and utterly tricked by Bismarck, Favre had failed to inform Gambetta that the armistice did not extend to eastern France. Bordeaux therefore instructed Garibaldi and Clinchant, who had taken over Bourbaki's command, that hostilities were at an end, and the Germans saw to it that the

truth was not told them until a rapid concentration of enemy forces compelled Garibaldi to fall back on Macon and left Clinchant no choice save between internment and surrender. After this last tragic disillusion the French continued their miserable retreat. A few battalions were rounded up ; a few more made their way over the Jura paths to Lyons ; 80,000 men gave up their arms as they staggered across the Swiss frontier.

The national defence was over.

XII

GAMBETTA THE DICTATOR

A FORTNIGHT after Gambetta's arrival at Tours, Thiers returned from his mission to the courts of Europe. He explained to the members of the delegation the British plan for an armistice, to which the other Powers were prepared to give their diplomatic support, and invited the comments of the four ministers present. Gambetta explained his own standpoint. No armistice would be acceptable which would disorganize the national defence. He was therefore opposed to the armistice involving disarmament, which the British Government had proposed to Thiers, and which Thiers himself was inclined to favour. But if the Paris Government agreed to the plan Gambetta was willing to give way. Accordingly the delegation held it "indispensable that Thiers should go to Paris and lay his proposals before the central Government, whose sovereign authority would judge the situation and come to such conclusions as its circumstances demanded."

The obvious meaning of this language is that the Tours delegation considered itself a subordinate body, owing obedience to the Cabinet in Paris. Such, however, was not its meaning as intended by Gambetta or as understood by his colleagues in Paris, and probably by Thiers. What Gambetta wished to convey was that the Tours delegates were members of the Cabinet, but that they formed a minority, and would yield rather than resign if the majority did not share their opinions. Their readiness to acquiesce sprang, of course, from patriotic motives, but was only possible because Thiers could communicate their views directly to the rest of the Cabinet. In the absence of such communication the Government would break into two parts, neither of which possessed authority strictly sovereign, though each could assume sovereignty within its own area. According to French ideas, always a little inclined to formalism in matters of political principle,

this was a correct statement of the constitutional position as it had existed since 4 September. But what was the sanction of the sovereign authority to which the united Government laid claim? In fact, it had no sanction. Gambetta himself, it will be remembered, had done his utmost to endow the new régime with a proper constitutional ancestry. He had wished it to be created by the Legislative Body into whose hands had obviously lapsed whatever sovereign power was left in France after the surrender of the Emperor. His wish having been frustrated, he had himself proclaimed the Republic which thus arose spontaneously out of the ashes of the dead Empire. That it had a constitutional existence could be inferred from the fact that all France actually accepted it. A plebiscite would have confirmed it could a plebiscite have been held. But a plebiscite was objectionable on account of its imperialist associations. On the other hand a formal election could not, according to French ideas, produce a body whose function would be confined to confirming the régime in being. It could issue in nothing less than a constituent assembly, itself the sole receptacle of sovereignty. The Government, anxious to regularize itself, was at first in favour of such an assembly. But elections were impossible without the co-operation of the enemy, who was in occupation of large tracts of eastern France; and as the enemy would not co-operate except on terms intolerable to the Government, the project fell through. The Government of National Defence was therefore well content to base itself on the solidarity of the public opinion behind it, and it was the force of Gambetta's appeal to the unmistakeable unity of France that enabled him to break the power of the regional leagues during his first days at Tours. The position that the Government spoke for France because France was behind it, was indeed self-evident to every Frenchman. His actions proved it. But it was by no means self-evident to the enemy. He could legitimately require to be satisfied as to the authority of the Government which, in the name of France, concluded the preliminaries of peace. Only an election could give him the necessary satisfaction. The question of an armistice and the question of an election were thus indissolubly linked. So much was and remained common ground between the enemy and every section of French opinion.

But at the end of October a far-reaching change was introduced into the situation. The Government in Paris was cut

off from the rest of France, and its authority in Paris itself was challenged. It therefore appealed to the people of Paris for a mandate, and was confirmed in its position by an overwhelming vote.¹ The Government in Paris was thus clothed with complete but at the same time limited constitutional authority. It was the regular and lawful Government of Paris; but it was not the Government of France. The constitutional position taken up by Gambetta in his despatch on the eve of the capitulation was absolutely sound. Neither, in law nor in fact had the Government any right to treat on behalf of any part of France except Paris. It was Bismarck who willed otherwise; but Bismarck himself admitted that his will would require retrospective sanction from an assembly, for whose immediate election he therefore stipulated.

The Paris plebiscite shocked Gambetta. He failed to appreciate the local conditions which had rendered it necessary, and was conscious only of its unhappy effect on his own position. It destroyed at a blow the whole authority of the Tours delegation. Of whom was the delegation now composed? Of members of the Paris Government; and what right had isolated Paris to impose her agents on the rest of France? Many of Gambetta's prefects were of opinion that Tours could only regularize its position by taking a plebiscite in its turn, but Gambetta vehemently opposed this view as short-sighted and erroneous. Such a plebiscite would destroy the unity of France. It would equip the country with two distinct Governments, resting on parallel but different sanctions—the metropolitan government in Paris, and the provincial government in Tours. Moreover a plebiscite would at once introduce political issues. Gambetta was the minister directing the country's efforts in the war. But he was also a republican, and monarchists and imperialists in the departments would inevitably boggle over the nature of the authority which they were invited to establish in the name of patriotism. A plebiscite would thus rob the September revolution of all its moral grandeur. The enemies of the Republic would represent the electoral campaign as a dirty Jacobin intrigue, which sought to pluck a party advantage out of the misfortunes of France. The feeble and mistaken action of the Paris Government had already

¹ The Paris plebiscite took place on 3 November. The question put was whether the Government of National Defence should remain in office. There voted: Ayes, 559,000; Noes, 62,000.

provided the detractors of the Republic with dangerous material; a provincial plebiscite would turn republicanism into a faction, cripple the military efforts in progress, perhaps kindle civil war. Gambetta would have none of it. He would, on the contrary, bury so far as might be the ugly fact of the Paris plebiscite, and continue to govern by acclamation.

In his evidence before the Commission of Inquiry, Gambetta declared that France was behind him until the middle of December, after which date opinion began to incline more and more towards elections which would bring peace. This judgment, which Gambetta formed after the lapse of time had enabled him to view events in perspective, must be pronounced sound. The temper of France, which had been hardened by the fall of Metz, was terribly weakened by the fall of Orleans and the consequent retreat of the Government from Tours to Bordeaux. But in the thick of the fight Gambetta would not admit this painful truth. He clung to the view that the heart of France was sound, and that its waverings had been brought about by Bonapartist gold. Every fresh symptom of weakness was thus interpreted by him as fresh evidence of a hideous anti-patriotic conspiracy directed by the man of Sedan. It would be inadvisable to lay too much stress on the despatch of 24 December, in which he assured Paris that he had the country with him in his resolve to fight to the death. From the first Gambetta thought it his duty to encourage Paris by painting the provincial situation in cheerful colours. But his few public speeches are conclusive as to his state of mind. Yet the mere fact that he found it necessary to deliver speeches was in itself an admission that opinion was no longer steady. In his best days at Tours he never addressed the people except once, when he gave them the great news of the Paris sortie. But at the end of the year he found it necessary to deliver an eulogy of republicanism to the people of Bordeaux. He took as his text Napoleon III's famous pronouncement in the same city that Empire was Peace, and did not lack material for ironic comment. With the falsehood and repression of the old régime, he contrasted the Republic, vowed to maintain and honour Liberty even when blackened, insulted, and abused. Only when Liberty was turned against herself did it become licence and require suppression. For Liberty's sake he called that day on the officers of the local National Guard to swear to fight to the death in the assurance that in the end victory must crown the arms

of a France incorporating principles which could not and would not die. Noble and earnest words—but what were the principles which circumstances were already forcing Gambetta to apply? That France was a Republic and a fighting Republic; and that any citizen who spoke of peace was a Bonapartist and a traitor, the two words being in fact synonymous. Clearly there was no salvation for France in a doctrine so narrow and so cruel.

Three weeks later Gambetta himself could no longer blink the truth. In the hope of putting new life into the broken northern defence, he had gone to Lille. There as everywhere, he mournfully admitted to a colleague, he found a population weakening in courage, steadiness, and resolve. The speech in which he strove to put new hearts into their wavering breasts is argumentative and even apologetic in tone. Liberty will no longer admit of the triumphant revelation that rejoices in incidental hardship. On the contrary the doctrine that war is itself the crowning evil is seriously examined. The orator pleaded that there could not be peace because the war which had been declared on Napoleon was now being waged on France. Peace involved the mutilation of France, the cession of French territory. There was no authority, not minority nor majority nor even unanimity, which had the right to dispose of the soil of France. It might be objected that all was lost, that resistance was become mere foolhardiness, that national pride was squandering men's lives in mere postponement of its inevitable fall. The objection was preposterously exaggerated. In four months the Republic had raised such an army as the Empire had not been able to put into the field after twenty years. France had admittedly paid a price for the effort; but in France life, social and commercial, was still maintained, whereas in Germany it was altogether suspended. There the nation had indeed been sacrificed to the army; by remaining true to herself France would prove that this army, organized at such a cost, could not subdue another nation.

Both at Lille and at Bordeaux Gambetta defended himself in stinging phrases against the charge of conducting a tyranny. But the despatch addressed to Paris on the eve of the capitulation contains an admission that he was forcing war upon a people set on peace. The Government can be carried on in its present unauthorized form, he contends, but not without recourse to energetic measures of repression. It will be necessary to replace a purely moral authority—the Govern-

ment by acclamation of four months before—by an avowed dictatorship.

After the capitulation the full tendencies of his policy became apparent. Favre had surrendered in the name of France. The procedure was, to Gambetta's mind, inexcusable, but, since it had been adopted, he was still Minister of the Interior in the Government of France and could judge the general situation far better than his colleagues long immured in Paris. As Minister of the Interior he had a prescriptive right to make the elections and of that right he promptly availed himself in most emphatic fashion. He issued a decree prohibiting the candidature of any person who had stood as official candidate under the Empire. It was an outrageously sweeping measure, excluding not merely a few notorious adventurers, who would in any case never have dared to face the polls, but numbers of quite respectable persons who had set themselves to make the best of the Empire in the days when the Empire was conferring real benefits on provincial France. That Gambetta should have been betrayed into so grievous an error was due to the fact that his judgment was off its balance, and that he persisted in attributing to Bonapartist corruption the weakness and hopelessness with which France was visibly stricken. Bismarck was not the man to lose the chance of scoring a point against the only Frenchman whom he still feared. Striking a fine moral attitude he protested to Paris against this arbitrary suppression of electoral freedom. Paris could only acquiesce, but Gambetta placarded Bismarck's telegram up in Bordeaux with his own biting comments and proceeded to argue the point with the Paris faint-hearts. Paris sent Jules Simon to bring the intractable dictator to reason. Simon, an ex-professor of moral philosophy, was not the man to ride out a tempest of political controversy. His memoirs tell the unhappy tale of his experiences. He brought with him a document from Paris cancelling the obnoxious electoral decree. But he did not dare produce it in the face of the resolute Gambetta supported by his fellow-delegates. Getting into quiet touch with a friendly Bordeaux paper, Simon arranged for the document to be published. The delegation at once suppressed a journal which defied the censorship. What was poor Simon to do? The temper of Bordeaux itself was adamant. Gambetta held it in his hand. An appeal to the army was possible, but the army too might prove Gambetta's. Simon told Paris of his troubles and Paris sent

him reinforcements—three more members of the Government. The limitation of numbers was prudent. It left the parties in Bordeaux equally matched, four against four. A fifth envoy from Paris would have united Gambetta's colleagues around their leader. As it was they might be won over. A meeting on 5 February left Gambetta isolated, and he resigned that night. His last official act testified to the real nobility and breadth of his nature. He joined his signature to the names of the colleagues with whom he was breaking on so vital a point of principle in a last appeal to France to remain united in her sorrows.

But this last splendid gesture, accompanied as it was by his resignation, served but to point the contrast with his previous attitude. France prepared for the elections with a sigh of relief for the end of what had indeed become a dictatorship. The opinions which had inspired Gambetta's electoral decree were in very fact a degradation both of the national idea and of the republican principle, and Gambetta's belief that to hold them was to play the patriot and the statesman was a miserable delusion. Its consequences were bound to be grave in a country which still remembered how Napoleon had sacrificed the best blood of France to his own ambitions. They were grave enough to blur the significance of Gambetta's achievement and to cast suspicion on the policy to which he was to devote his remaining years. These last few weeks of ruthless and obstinate war-frenzy brought Gambetta into conflict with the instinct of France towards order and stability. Hence the fury with which his enemies afterwards assailed him, the utter lack of gratitude for the zeal which had plucked France out of the abyss, the painful break with Thiers, the one Frenchman of the day whose patriotism truly matched Gambetta's own. There is nothing more pitiful in all this tragic phase of French history than the unseemly wrangle of these two great Frenchmen over the grave of their country's military glory, Thiers deriding the national regeneration after Sedan as the policy of a wild madman, Gambetta scorning the upholder of France's honour in Europe for an intriguing dotard. Meanwhile the curs of the pack yelped characteristically. Gambetta was arraigned as a pinchbeck Napoleon who had bled France white while himself living in luxurious ease. Evidence was actually brought forward in support of a charge which even French party hatred should have dismissed as incredible. There was an episode which occurred in the middle of December, that anxious period after

the loss of Orleans when Gambetta was working his hardest to put new spirit into the two armies which he was creating out of D'Aurelle's disheartened forces. Gambetta was never the man to indulge his body—least of all at such a time as this. But even Gambetta could not work all day without any respite. It was his practice to take a short walk after lunch, smoking a cigar as he walked. Steenackers, who knew his habits, bought a box of good cigars at Bordeaux and sent them to Gambetta at Bourges.¹ Gambetta telegraphed his thanks and on the strength of this telegram was branded a Sardanapalus. In truth he was utterly unsparing of his energies during these four arduous months. France and her needs filled his thoughts all day and intruded upon his nights. He was scarcely allowed an hour's uninterrupted sleep, so constantly were matters arising which needed the instant decision that only Gambetta could give. His private correspondence during this period consisted in all of one letter—the tender little note which he sent, early in January, to his sister on learning of her husband's death in Paris during the siege.

Yet in the end he failed, in spite of his indomitable patriotism and even, in a sense, because of it. The contrast of which he was himself conscious, between an exhausted France rebelling against Gambetta's call to further efforts, and a sullen Paris boiling with energies unexhausted because she had had no Gambetta to direct them, suggests that it might have been better both for the minister and for his country if his advice had been taken and the Government had quitted Paris in September leaving the favourite of Belleville to conduct its defence. Gambetta would at least have had the courage to break with Trochu as he broke with D'Aurelle, would have evolved an army in the capital, which contained as much military material as the rest of France put together, would have gathered all the resources and enthusiasm of the people behind some competent leader, Ducrot or another, would have seen to it that the tempestuous fervour of the besieged city was given a complete

¹ The gift is evidence of the warm relations which Gambetta knew how to establish with his subordinates. His friendship with Steenackers was especially close and receives another illustration from Gambetta's official correspondence. It was proposed to him that Steenackers should be given the Legion of Honour. Gambetta objected; the director of telegraphs was a member of the inner circle of government so that the conferment of a decoration upon him might make it appear that the Bordeaux Cabinet formed a mutual admiration society. But to gild the pill, he sent Steenackers a charming telegram, using the "tu" of intimacy and explaining that under the circumstances refusal really implied a greater compliment than acquiescence.

outlet against the enemy. The Paris which Gambetta would at last have surrendered to the Germans would have been a Paris with no more stomach for fighting. There would have ensued no Commune with its horrors and its ghastly memories to poison the political life of the next decade. All this is as certain as any historical speculation can be. Nevertheless Gambetta did greater and more lasting work for France in the part which he actually filled than he could have accomplished in isolated Paris, whatever immediate success might have been his. The situation was such that the war could not be won nor Paris saved. The one hope for France was that she should somehow be given the spirit which should impel her to rise out of the trough of disaster. That spirit was Gambetta's gift. He was the Joan of Arc of his epoch. He too saved France.

He saved her in the discharge of a mission of which he, too, was fully conscious. From his first active intervention in politics he had felt the call to prove and justify the Revolution. It was for him to show that the ideal enthusiasms of 1789 could be translated into the terms of matter-of-fact nineteenth century reforms. He aimed consistently at results. When his opportunity came the circumstances were intimidating. It had been his programme to restore the old vigour and decision to a France made gross and flabby by imperial corruption. In the event he was called upon to give new life to a France prostrate in the dust. His republican inspiration did not desert him. Appealing to the tradition of 1792 he stirred a people in consternation at the failure of its professionalized army to lay the sure foundation of new military strength. Out of the defeat of Bonapartism he brought to birth the fresh hope of a nation in arms. The hope was not to play France false. For over forty years she clung to it, and, when her further hour of agony came in 1914, was to find in it her certain stay. The army which barred the Germans' passage, the army of the Marne and of Verdun, was Gambetta's army. There is not a day in the war, General Gallieni told M. Reinach, but has magnified Gambetta's fame; and it was with tact and truth that M. Reinach dedicated his final volume of Gambettist studies to Marshal Joffre.

Victory is not to be improvised, said Gambetta himself, who had studied his enemies to good purpose. In so far as he sought to improvise it he failed. In so far as the bitterness of defeat drove him back on a policy of harsh improvisation he was false to his mission. But to the long view the victory which so

far from being improvised took almost fifty years to achieve, was his work—the slow fruit of his organization and his impulse. And even to the shorter view—to von der Goltz's view for example—a very real victory was his. He routed the forces which were compassing the death of France. All her regeneration was built on her sense of military pride, restored thanks to him. M. Barbou, whose book, "Gambetta the Patriot," was long the popular republican standard life and is still not quite displaced by ex-President Deschanel's more discriminating biography, has only given a rhetorical flourish to the truth when he writes that by restoring her honour, Gambetta gave France the will to live ; and that the page of history which he turned, though bloodstained, was not blackened.

The man of whom this could be said has already deserved well of the Republic. There is, indeed, nothing in Gambetta's later career which moves the imagination or kindles enthusiasm like the period of his dictatorship. But the fact that his career was not closed, that its most enduring phase had not yet opened, is itself matter for something approaching marvel. He was broken in health and, for the moment, broken in hope. He saw the sanest minds in France aroused against him. He saw Paris inflict on republicanism a stain so hideous that his work threatened to be set back for a generation. Yet before the year was out he was again discharging his mission, patiently, confidently, irresistibly. The nation in arms was but one of the traditions of the Revolution, for the moment the most essential but for posterity the least inspiring. It was not the rock on which the Republic could be built ; at best it was the shield by which the Republic could be defended. The more arresting and fundamental but more visionary ideals of 1789 still required to be clothed in sober modern dress. The task seemed little to the capacities or to the tastes of the man who had won his way first to fame and then to infamy through his fervid organization of a desperate war. Yet it was to this task that Gambetta, with no thought of personal rehabilitation, consecrated the rest of his days. Before he died he was to discover, though dimly, that it was accomplished. The opportunist of genius again adapts himself to circumstances, again makes his mission meet the needs of French democracy ; so that almost without a pause, the lips which had imperiously called France to battle began to utter their tranquillizing summons to the constructive labours of peace.

PART III—THE REPUBLIC

XIII

THE CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUE

BISMARCK'S armistice provided for the free election within ten days of a National Assembly, to decide between peace and war. There was, of course, no question of an election campaign. Neither the time nor its circumstances permitted the customary preliminaries to the consultation of the people. Half the country was in the hands of the enemy, and throughout the other half communications were irregular and life disorganized. Each department felt itself isolated and each was without guidance within its own boundaries. The Napoleonic functionaries, who for twenty years had helped to manipulate the popular vote, had been deprived of their offices by the Government of National Defence, and the accumulation of military disasters had robbed them of whatever influence might have attached to them in retirement. The people were free to vote according to their wills. They voted without ambiguity on the issue as laid down by the conqueror. Save in Paris there was no talk of political programmes ; and save in Paris and in the threatened provinces there was no notable mass of opinion in favour of renewing the war. In general, no questions were asked of a candidate provided he stood under the flag of truce. At a later date, it was much canvassed whether an Assembly elected under such conditions could claim a mandate to settle the constitution of France. Beyond doubt constitutional questions were not in the minds of the electors, and a vote for a peace candidate of monarchist views was not intended to convey disapproval of the form assumed by the Government of National Defence. It may well be that remembrance of the chaos produced by the republican Assembly of 1848 induced some to vote against

republican candidates ; it may be too, that the war-weary elector was chary of supporting the party which, while on the whole obviously inclined towards the peace presaged by the armistice terms, nevertheless included among its members the firebrand Gambetta and all the prominent supporters of his policy of war to the death. Substantially, however, the form of government was not in issue, and Gambetta was technically right in maintaining that the Assembly had exhausted its mandate in concluding peace, and had gone beyond it in declaring itself constituent. Certainly the average elector can never have dreamed that the sessions of the Assembly would extend to within a few days of five years. But in the wider sense the majority was right in refusing to consider its task ended until it had built up a new France out of the ruins. For the popular mind reposed all its hopes for the future in the Assembly which it had chosen, explicitly indeed to make peace, but implicitly to save France by making peace. Throughout all its difficulties, which were many, and amid all its divisions, which were profound, the Assembly was sustained by an exalted consciousness of its mission. Sprung from the people, it was resolute to keep faith with the people, and to this resolution the majority sacrificed its convictions at the last. The Assembly gave France what she wanted—peace, order, a government, a constitution. It liquidated the appalling cost of the war ; it provided a broken country with a disciplined army and a reasoned scheme of defence ; it reorganized on sound and liberal lines the local life of the departments ; it made a beginning of the thorniest but most vital matter of reconstruction, the creation of a national system of education. In all essential features the France which has now avenged 1870 was its work ; and no Parliament which has ever come together has more thoroughly merited the gratitude both of its electors and of posterity.

The composition of this body was as remarkable as its achievements. It was a microcosm of French society, and most faithfully reflected the divisions by which that society was rent. All classes were represented, nobles, clergy, officers, public servants, men of learning, men of business, men of the people. There were country gentry, the last survivors of the Restoration ; there were the leaders of the middle classes, looking back regretfully to the comfortable days of the July monarchy ; and there were the heirs of the revolution—republicans of the old school, the veterans of 1848, and

republicans of the new school, the leaders of young France. These three sections were almost equally strong in numbers. The Assembly was completed by a rump of Bonapartists—reminders that, after all, the Second Empire had driven its roots deep. But there were no groups of professional politicians. The Assembly was composed in the main of intensely honourable men without experience of affairs; for in her hour of need France had turned to figures of local eminence whom she could trust.

Before this Assembly, and in part by this Assembly, there was played out the clearest and most moving drama of political ideals that the modern world has known. The time had come when France could no longer palter with the issues raised by the Revolution. Three generations had exhausted themselves and their country in fruitless efforts after compromise. There had been the Napoleonic compromise. It had carried the glory of France over Europe, but had in the end been broken by a Europe united against it. There had been the compromise of the Restoration. It had hardened into reaction and had perished in a popular tumult. It had been succeeded by the compromise of Orleanism, which had been so careful not to give offence that it had died of general contempt. Then came the futilities of 1848 and the Second Republic, which had served only to exhibit the full magnitude of the problems it was powerless to handle. Refuge was found in the new compromise of the Second Empire, which had now crashed down under the impact of the aggression it had provoked. Thus every essay had culminated in disaster, the fruit, in the last resort, of the dissensions by which France was torn. For her own sake and for Europe's, France must set her house in order.

The need for clear, remorseless thinking compelled her to confront the opposing ideals. On the one side the old France of St Louis and Joan of Arc; on the other the new France of Voltaire and Auguste Comte. Since they could no longer be reconciled, one or other must prevail. In this great conflict, so full of meaning for all mankind, the climax of a century of movement and struggles, Gambetta was the voice and brain of the new France. It was in no temper of rhetorical exaggeration that one of his followers—an obscure provincial mayor—was inspired to hail him as the torch of liberty, the hope and prop of the Republic. In him and through him the aspirations of democracy came to their fulfilment. He was himself

conscious enough of the grandeur of his mission, and to discharge it availed himself of two means familiar now, but then without precedent in French history. He made public speeches and founded a newspaper.

The idea that a statesman should justify his programme from the platform savoured too much of the Revolution and was too obvious an infraction of parliamentary sovereignty, to appeal to the sober and somewhat conservative temper of the 'seventies. Gambetta did not contemplate, nor could his health have endured, frequent harangues before monster audiences. Besides there were still on the statute book laws restricting public meetings, legacies of the Second Empire, which the Government, dependent as it was on a conservative and monarchist Assembly, could not but put in force against him. But he felt himself the centre of his party, and for ten years made it his business to unite and inspire it. Up and down France he travelled, and everywhere the leading republicans came together to hear him. In nearly threescore speeches at luncheons, at dinners, at private receptions, once even in a tent where the rain drowned his voice, he preached the whole gospel of republicanism to a few hundred hearers, chosen because they were most competent to spread it. His critics called him a commercial traveller. He publicly gloried in the title. Yes, he travelled in democracy, and the French people was his employer. It was always dangerous to give Gambetta the chance of a retort.

Through these speeches France became conscious of her unity and of the inner meaning of the republicanism in which alone it could find expression. The genius of the orator brought together facts, policies, and ideals, drove them into the national consciousness, and evoked a national sentiment which nothing could resist. The development of republican doctrine at his hands will be traced in due course; but as an outline of his system and as an example both of method and matter, there may now be quoted in full the five-minute speech which he delivered to a deputation of working men who waited on him during his visit to Savoy in the autumn of 1872. After a few words of thanks he addressed himself at once to his main and only subject, "a matter which touches all of us, I mean the interests and future of France, both of which are vitally connected with the maintenance of the republican Government. Yes, my friends, let us never weary of discussing

the future of France, for there is none of us, be his state high or low, who can stand aloof from his country's destiny and future. It is not so long since we paid a terrible penalty for our forgetfulness of France, and of the duties which fell upon us because we are born on French soil. Every French mother, wherever she may be—"the oblique reference to French mothers on the further side of the new frontier would not escape his hearers—"must cherish and foster in her children a worship, a religious passion for France, so that the children may succeed where their fathers failed. And if there is one thing that can comfort and strengthen us in our sorrowful mourning for our dismembered country, it is the thought of those good French mothers who will assure to France her champions and avengers.

"But all these thoughts will be mere castles in the air, idle visions which will involve us in their own lack of substance, unless, before we think of the future, we make certain of the present by the definite establishment of a government of justice—universal justice—and equality. I do not mean that grudging, spiteful equality, which our critics attribute to us, but that equality of rights and duties which recognizes no distinctions between citizens save such as flow from character, rectitude, insight, energy in all the battle of life. This is an equality which itself demands as a preliminary condition that the State or society shall first have fulfilled its duty of providing every child on its entry into life with its primary and most essential stock-in-trade education. Without this stock-in-trade all other goods are worthless. We have not come into the world merely to conquer nature but to make life better both for ourselves and for our fellows.

"Now there is only one Government, one system, one law, able to bring about the reforms which can ensure the worth of man and his progressive freedom in his home and country, which can give him the place in the sun that is his by right. That system is the Republic. Hence it comes about that wherever citizens and peoples are oppressed by rotten Governments and struggle against the oppression, we find them instinctively, first from feeling and afterwards from reason, hailing with passionate hearts the name Republic."

Only Gambetta could have delivered this little speech; but its impersonal tone is characteristic. Over and over again Gambetta rebuked his audiences for shouting his name.

Let them rather cheer for the Republic. He was perfectly sincere. The man mattered nothing, the principle everything, and it was the better to enforce the principle that Gambetta chose by preference some anniversary, such as the date of Hoche's birth, or the 14th July, on which to teach the lessons and point the moral of the Revolution.

Gambetta lived at a time when the full consequences of the invention of printing became apparent. In the Europe of the 'seventies there was an immense diffusion of printed matter, both books and newspapers. Particularly in France did the newspaper habit develop in the decade of the war, and many of the great provincial dailies first appeared during this period. Marinoni's construction of the rotary printing press revealed the possibility, promptly seized on by Girardin, of a halfpenny paper based on advertisement. Gambetta was in no hurry to enter this field of journalism; it was not till 1876 that his paper threw out a halfpenny edition mainly for provincial circulation.¹ His aim was not to get readers but to make converts, though even so his paper was not so much propagandist as educative. The publication in November 1871, of the first number of the "*République française*," which replaced Peyrat's moribund "*Avenir national*," marks Gambetta's resumption of his proper place in the public life of France. The paper, as its name indicates, was a missionary enterprise, and was conducted with solemn enthusiasm. Its initial capital of 125,000 francs was mainly subscribed in Alsace-Lorraine. Its business was to include all the news that a good citizen ought to know. It taught. It taught opinions, of course, and as time went on this function became predominant. But at first its main object was to teach facts. It sought to make the public understand what constituted affairs and how and by whom they were handled. Its critical standards of news were exalted, but for a time they prevailed. The "*République française*" became the model newspaper of its day, and within a decade there was not an important daily in Paris which was not imitating its earnest, didactic, comprehensive attitude towards facts.

The paper became the centre of Gambetta's life. On his return to France in 1871, he went back to the flat in 12 Rue Montaigne which he had taken when he first became famous.

¹ In the following year Edmond Adam sold this offshoot for 1,500,000 francs, and the transference of this sum to Gambetta accounts for the comparative affluence of the last four years of his life.

There he lived for the next seven years, his aunt still keeping house for him. But when the "République française" moved to roomy premises in the Rue Chaussée d'Autin, Gambetta decided to take up his quarters on the spot. Aunt Tata died just before the move was made. Gambetta lived at his offices until his election as President of the Chamber provided him with an official residence. His editorial rooms were doubly his home because he had all his friends about him. Spuller, Freycinet, Challemel-Lacour and the rest of his old circle were given posts on the staff of the "République française," and promising recruits were invited to contribute to its columns. Challemel-Lacour controlled and directed their miscellaneous efforts. Inside the office Gambetta himself bowed to his authority, which was resisted only by Paul Bert, a brilliant physiologist and the apostle of scientific enlightenment in education. The supreme political direction was in the hands of Gambetta himself and was characteristically undertaken. Every evening when he was in Paris, he went to the offices of the paper, exchanged greetings with everybody and gathered the leading members of the staff about him in the editor's room. There was a brief general discussion of the events of the day. Then Gambetta delivered himself of his views on policy as though addressing a meeting. It was the only way. His impetuous temperament forbade it that the eloquence which sat on his tongue could be so disciplined as to flow through his pen. After he had left, his colleagues wrote down his phrases, Spuller with his admirable memory playing principal Boswell to this editorial Johnson, and the vigorous speech was concentrated into the form of a leading article.

Throughout the critical years during which he was founding the Republic, the paper was Gambetta's main instrument for forming and guiding opinion. Speeches alone, however numerous, would not have enabled him to discharge his mission; the paper alone, however earnest, would have failed to gain hearts. But speeches and paper together made Gambetta the strongest force in France. Through the paper he held the country's ear; through the speeches he gave impetus and local guidance to the republican movement. Posterity reads the speeches, but at the time it was the paper which made it possible for Gambetta to keep abreast of his task. That task was gigantic. Its final end was the triumphant assertion of French republicanism, but its attainment involved the pursuit and

settlement of a multitude of details. Gambetta had not to deal with a calm and ordered France methodically deliberating principles of government. His France, as he never forgot, was shattered and required to be built up again from her very foundations, the nature of the foundations being itself all the while in dispute. Every practical issue arose simultaneously—foreign policy, domestic policy, finance, defence, education—and every practical issue led directly to the vital matter of principle. Because of the paper Gambetta was consistently able to handle the topic of the moment and consistently to pass from it to the great constitutional theory on which all his policy depended ; and thus to prove himself at once a teacher and man of affairs, the nearest approach that our time has known to a philosopher-king. Perhaps, indeed, he would not have shuddered at the regal title, for Plato's translators have given the name Republic to the ideal state over which philosopher-kings rule, and Gambetta himself, true in this to the classical traditions of his upbringing, qualified the Republic of his hopes with the name Athenian. At any rate the "*République française*" is an exemplar of the educational theories of Plato's Republic, and Gambetta's speeches conform to the canons of art which the Republic was prepared to tolerate. They give emphatic answer to the criticism that the art of that Utopia would have been intolerably boring. The variety of the speeches is a wonder and a delight. Each is suited to the peculiar quality of its audience ; each offers a definite contribution to the politics of the hour ; and all exhibit with masterly clearness the governing principles by which the suggested action is inspired. They are, in fact—and this justifies the loose structure and easy diction frowned at by stylists of the more precise modern school—speeches and not lectures ; always of the moment and always to the point, they are illustrations, unsurpassed in French literature of the tempestuous and volatile glory of words.

Holding this view of his mission, Gambetta was not likely to confine his activities too closely to an Assembly which, as he told it six months after its election, had already fulfilled its purpose and ought to give place to another better authorized to determine the political destinies of France. Accordingly he was not prominent in its most critical debates, though his work came to exercise decisive influence on divisions. But since the Assembly was sovereign and since the future of France was involved in its votes, he followed the parliamentary battle very

carefully and so thoroughly controlled its issue that, though the Assembly had known him only as leader of a section of the left, the Chamber which succeeded it hailed him as the representative and mouthpiece of its predominant republicanism. For the time being, however, he watched and only occasionally pounced. The least movement of the imperialists brought him to his feet, hot, aggressive, merciless. As he once told an audience, the very sound of the word Empire made him physically sick. But he was contemptuous of attacks from men of the old school, and there were many such in the Assembly. When one of them had denounced him from the tribune for an hour Gambetta was content to rise in his place and observe that it was a case for a brain specialist. His place was away on the left, a corner seat on the second bench, and he was seldom absent from it. But the figure with which the Assembly became familiar was not the figure which had been the terror of ministers in the old Legislative Body. At thirty-three Gambetta was already middle-aged. He had begun to put on flesh, and his hair and beard were flecked with grey. He sprawled on his bench, his head turned sideways so that he could survey the whole Assembly with his one effective eye. His fellow-members thus grew to know his face in profile, in which position it was redeemed from heaviness by the height of the brow and the clear-cut distinction of the nose.¹ To the majority he was a force and a portent, and his influence was at once compelling and repulsive. M. Hanotaux has summed it up neatly; "his appearance at the tribune secured silence, his words unchained the storm."

When Gambetta cast his eye over his opponents in the Assembly it could never light upon their leader. Old France was now grouped—not always compactly—behind a mediæval figure who had wandered strangely into the latter nineteenth century. The Comte de Chambord, known as the child of miracle because he had been born eight months after his father's murder, was the last male of the main Bourbon line. With him the elder branch came to an end, and never did it throw off a more characteristic shoot. In 1871, the Comte de Chambord was fifty-one years old, had just celebrated his silver wedding, and was childless. This last fact governed the whole situation. In 1830 the seamless robe of monarchy had been rent; it could

¹ The nose was semitic and Gambetta was sometimes called a Jew in prejudice. So far as is known, however, there was no Jewish strain in his blood. The nose may have derived from some remote Phœnician ancestor.

now be made whole again, for the Orleans pretender, the Comte de Chambord's cousin and rival, was also his heir. A reconciliation would thus pave the way for a restored monarchy which would be at once traditional and revolutionary and a throne would be set up at whose foot the old and the new France could both find legitimate place. Reconciliation therefore was the aim of every monarchist in France. Let it but take place and the true king could come into his own again; but unless the Monarchy was made one and indivisible, like the Republic, there was no hope. Accommodation was thus in the air; but there was one person with whom accommodation was impossible—the Comte de Chambord himself. Looking on the record of suffering and disaster which had made up French history since 1789, the Comte de Chambord found its explanation in the breach between France and the Monarchy by which her greatness had been brought about. Let France once realize her errors and follies, let her but turn again to her legitimate sovereign, and he would hear her and serve her. So and only so would both he and France become their true selves again. But the Comte de Chambord could make no terms with the Revolution. On the contrary the Revolution must surrender itself utterly to the old Monarchy and the old faith. The Comte de Chambord was an entirely honest man, with princely qualities—personal charm, clearness of thought and phrase, tact, dignity. Gambetta did not give his whole character when he described him as “an ascetic, ready to bury himself in a cloister, his flag wrapped round him.” But he was right in so far that first and foremost the Comte de Chambord was a man of principle. What was he without principle, the monarchist principle, of which he, with fourteen centuries of history behind him, was the modern incarnation? He answered the question with his own outspoken common-sense. Stripped of his principle he became a stout gentleman with a limp.¹ Such was the fitting temper of the man whose birth made him the embodiment of all the ideas which Gambetta sought to supplant by his new gospel.

There was yet a third main actor in the drama—the man in possession. The Assembly had been elected by departments, the arrangement being that in each department lists of candidates were put forward and all who received the due quota of votes were declared returned. Accordingly, where there was a dearth of local leaders, or where it was desired to strengthen the

¹ The limp was the result of a riding accident thirty years before.

list, the local committee invited some man of national eminence to allow his name to be put forward. Thanks to this system of multiple candidatures, Gambetta was himself elected in ten departments. But there was a man whose return for as many as twenty-six departments all over France marked him out as in a special sense the nation's choice. That man was Adolph Thiers. The "national historian"—the description is Napoleon III's—was now seventy-three, but still retained the exuberance of youth. His political career had begun under Charles X. More than any Frenchman of the time he was responsible for the establishment of the July monarchy. But Louis Philippe neither liked nor trusted him, and during the later part of his reign Thiers had withdrawn from active politics and had begun his history of the Revolution. He came to the front again as a critic of the Second Republic, and the Prince-President paid him the compliment of including him in the little group of deputies whom he arrested on the night of the *coup d'état*. Twelve years of retirement followed during which Thiers completed his history of the consulate and Empire and won that profound knowledge of men and affairs which historians are privileged to acquire. Elected again to the Legislative Body in 1863, he was pitiless in expressing all the errors of the régime, past, present and to come. During the war he had served the Government abroad, and on his return had negotiated with Bismarck an armistice which, had it been accepted, would have saved France Metz. He had now become the indispensable man, was full of energy for his work, and was at no pains to soften the unpopularity which always gathers about a statesman who is never wrong. He had proclaimed a truce to constitutional disputes until peace was signed, but soon realized with his usual clear-sightedness that it would be impossible to restore the Comte de Chambord. As he explained to the Assembly he was a monarchist whom necessity had made a republican. "The Republic," he declared, "is the form of Government which divides us least." The constitutional issue had arisen as soon as the Assembly met. Its first act was to designate Thiers as Chief of the Executive Power. Of what executive power? asked Thiers. If he was to negotiate with Bismarck it could not be as the head of an anonymous government. The Assembly obediently added the words "of the French Republic" to his title. Its act, decisive though it proved in the end, seemed at the time to commit nobody and to settle nothing. France had

been a Republic since 4 September. Better maintain the transitory régime a little longer, thought the Assembly, and not burden the restored monarchy with the responsibility for a humiliating peace.

Between Thiers's Republic as the line of least resistance and Gambetta's Republic as the assertion of an ideal, there yawned a gulf which neither was prepared to bridge. Yet bridged it must somehow be if the Republic was ever to be formally constituted. For, together, Thiers and Gambetta could speak for France. Behind Thiers was the weight of solid opinion which asked for nothing but order and tranquillity and the renewed assurance of a steady life. Behind Gambetta was all the young enthusiasm of a France still confident in its future. Once present and future joined hands France would find herself again.

The inevitable solution was reached at last, but after delays all the penalties for which fell on Thiers. In the end the Assembly constituted the Republic, but not till after it had forced Thiers's resignation and so had been able to make a fruitless essay of the monarchical restoration which his presence at the head of affairs had prevented. In the end, too, Gambetta recognized Thiers as his indispensable colleague. But it is dangerous to postpone co-operation with a man well stricken in years. Just when their agreement gave promise of fruitful results, Thiers died. His death doomed the rest of Gambetta's life to relative futility and delayed the main constructive policy of the Republic by a full generation.

XIV

FIRST STEPS TOWARDS REPUBLICAN UNION

WHEN the Assembly met, Gambetta opted for the threatened Lower Rhine out of the ten departments which had elected him, and took his seat with the Alsatian deputies. On 1 March the preliminaries of peace were voted by 546 to 107. There followed a scene never likely to fade from the memories of Frenchmen. M. Jean Grosjean, senior deputy for the Lost Provinces, rose and read a declaration. Its terms, which French boys were to learn by heart for the next forty years, were drawn up by Gambetta. "Before the opening of peace negotiations," it ran, "the representatives of Alsace-Lorraine deposited with the Secretariat of the National Assembly a declaration reiterating in due official form the will and right of the two provinces to remain French.

"Abandoned to foreign domination in despite of justice and by a hateful abuse of force, we have a last duty to fulfil. Once more we declare null and void a treaty which disposes of us without our consent.

"The reassertion of our rights remains open to each and all of us in the manner and measure his conscience may dictate.

"At the moment of our withdrawal from an Assembly in which our self-respect no longer suffers us to retain our seats, and in spite of the bitterness of our sorrow, there is one thought which possesses our hearts. It is the thought of gratitude towards those who, these six months, have never faltered in our defence, and of unalienable devotion to the France from whom we are forcibly parted. We shall follow you with our prayers and, with unabated confidence in the future, shall await the day when France, her strength renewed, will again fulfil her exalted destiny.

"Your brothers of Alsace and of Lorraine, torn in this hour from the household which they share with you, will regard

France, now absent from their hearth, with filial devotion until the day comes for her to regain her place."

When M. Grosjean had done reading, he and his colleagues left the theatre at Bordeaux in which the Assembly was holding its meetings, and Gambetta ceased to be a member of the House. That night M. Küss, Mayor of Strasbourg, deputy for the Lower Rhine, and one of the signatories of the declaration, died at Bordeaux. Gambetta remained in the city to act as a pall-bearer at his funeral, and at the railway station delivered a panegyric of the dead man and of his home. "Violence parts us," he concluded, "though only for a time, from Alsace, the historic cradle of French national feeling. Our brothers in those unhappy regions have worthily discharged their duty, and they at least have discharged it to the end. Let them take comfort in the thought that from henceforward French policy can pursue no other aim than their deliverance. To that end republicans must renew their oath of remorseless hatred of the dynasties and tyrants that have brought our disasters upon us, must forget their divisions, and must bind themselves together in patriotic aspiration towards a revenge which will re-establish right and justice over violence and outrage." These were Gambetta's last public words for four months. On the morrow he left for San Sebastian whence he denounced to his father the "ignorant and cowardly" Assembly "which could only cringe and bow to the conquerors' injunctions."

The spring which Gambetta spent in Spain was full of menace to the future of his Republic; and the blow was the more shattering because it was dealt by Paris, the very citadel of republican ideas. For six months the war had ruptured that intimate contrast between Paris and the provinces, which Frenchmen had for centuries regarded as the basis of their national life. The orphaned provinces had gathered themselves under the emergency administration of which Gambetta was the soul; but Paris had sought in vain for its Gambetta. Throughout the siege its life had moved aimlessly in a void; its eager young men had spent days and nights in fruitless marches, carrying rifles which, as Thiers dryly observed, they rarely used. The capitulation left the city bewildered, vindictive, and still armed. Its mood bred bitterness and passion to which its circumstances offered uncontrollable scope. Only the most tactful and sympathetic handling could avert an upheaval; and in place of tact and sympathy Paris

received two crowning humiliations. On 1 March Prussian troops passed under the Arc de Triomphe, marched up the Champs Elysées to the music of Schubert's "Marche Militaire,"¹ and bivouacked in the Place de la Concorde, its statues veiled in black. Ten days later the outraged city ceased to be the capital of France; on leaving Bordeaux the Assembly transferred itself and the central Government which depended on it, not to Paris, but to Versailles. Forthwith, as Gambetta appears to have foreseen would be the case, Paris began to translate its anger into terms of political theory. The cause of its degradation was traced to the national spirit which the Second Empire had made its mission to foster throughout Europe. Therefore the new Republic under which France would find regeneration must be the very negation of nationality. Henceforward there should be no France, only a loose agglomeration of the 35,000 French communes. The principle shocked every French patriot; its application horrified every civilized man. As the conflict of ideas between Paris and Versailles was fought out to its hideous conclusion of destruction and massacre, Gambetta, at San Sebastian, was faced with the mournful prospect that the Republic had been put back for a generation, and that its missionary would be condemned to wear out idle and obscure days in Spain. But such sombre thoughts could not long possess his ardent spirit, and he was roused from them by the letters he received from Spuller, who was watching the situation on the spot. Spuller, too, recognized that the Republic was in jeopardy. Nevertheless he did not despair; there was one man who could still save it—Gambetta. "Let me recall to you," he wrote in a letter destined to have incalculable consequences for France, "the talks we used to have about the visits you were to pay to the chief towns. I think such visits are now more necessary than ever. Until the Republic is proclaimed and established, you must play the part of a republican O'Connell. We will go from place to place scattering the democratic seed at dinners and improvised meetings. This *must* be done." Gambetta resolved to act on his friend's advice, and had not long to wait for his opportunity.

In truth Spuller was right in refusing to despair of the future. The authors of the Commune were swallowed up in the flames that they had kindled. With them perished the evil

¹ Art too has its memories; the same tune accompanied Foch in triumph up the same avenue on 14 July 1919.

spirit which was threatening the public peace. The memories of the Commune, with its 50,000 arrests and its 10,000 condemnations continued, indeed, to poison public life until Gambetta, nearly a decade later, wiped them out by carrying his motion for a general amnesty—the last great public service he was to render his country. But in the moment of her deepest abasement France began to manifest the first symptoms of the recovery which was so soon to astonish Europe. The Assembly itself recognized that new life was beginning to return. Owing to the system of multiple candidatures the tale of its membership was incomplete. Thiers alone had been elected in twenty-six departments, and the exercise of his option thus necessitated twenty-five bye-elections. In all there were 111 seats to be filled in forty-six departments. The Assembly fixed the elections for July, and Gambetta began his task of cleansing the besmirched republican name by accepting candidature for the Department of the Seine. On 26 June he returned to Bordeaux and declared his policy and programme to the assembled republican committees of the Gironde. The speech is of historic importance. The St Quentin speech of the following autumn created a more profound impression, and the Grenoble speech of the succeeding spring set the republican battle really raging ; but the Bordeaux speech not only revealed Gambetta's future position in French politics, but provided his party with a body of doctrine and a set of phrases which worked most powerfully upon opinion during the next four years. The tone of the speech was solemn but full of confidence. It opened with a statement of the actual situation. France was a Republic and her people were republicans. The duty of the republican party was therefore clear. It must accept Thiers's formula of "power to the wisest and the worthiest," and must prepare to govern. "We must prove," the speaker declared—and this was his only reference to the terrible events of April and May—"to those who despise or ignore us that we are . . . capable of controlling public affairs, that we are the party of intellect and reasonableness, and that the man who accepts our principles can give those guarantees of knowledge, patriotism, and social stability without which government becomes an enterprise run for private profit." The immediate policy of the party was deduced from these general principles. Admittedly the republicans were at present in opposition. But since the

Government was itself republican, the opposition was wholly constitutional. Moreover its work was not merely negative. It must construct. Republicanism had outlived its own heroic age, and "as it had been passionate and headstrong, so it must now be cool, patient, moderate, and practical." There must be no more hunting after Utopias.

The appeal lay to the popular vote ; therefore the aim must be simple and simply put. In sum, the end was to revive the weakened public spirit of France, and the one possible method was education. In a passage of rare foresight Gambetta developed the effects of education on the peasants who formed the bulk of the French electorate. The peasants, he insisted, were not monarchists ; under the Monarchy they had been serfs. The Revolution had given them their land, but they associated the Revolution with the name of the first Napoleon, and were therefore inclined to Bonapartism. Education would break this false association of ideas, and would thus perfect the work of the Revolution. Education, however, must be physical as well as intellectual. It must aim at making every Frenchman a good citizen and every citizen a good soldier. Under modern conditions the two ideals were inseparable. This declaration brought the speaker to the tenderest point in French politics. He treated it with firm tact. "To-day," he laid it down amidst low murmurs of sympathy and approval, "patriotism commands us to stifle reckless words, to keep our lips sealed, to restrain our anger deep down in our hearts, and to address ourselves to the great work of national reconstruction, bestowing upon it such time as will make it certain that our work shall endure. If it need ten years or twenty years, so be it. But it must be put in hand at once. Every year must see the entrance into life of young manhood, strong and sensible, loving knowledge as dearly as it loves France, cherishing the double truth that the service done her is good only if it be done with hand and brain together.

"To this end, knowledge must have its libraries and academies and learned institutions. Let its possessors lavish it on those who need it. Let it come down into the public places and be made accessible in the humblest schools. By this programme, radical yet truly conservative, the republican party will achieve something greater than office. It will create the ideas through which alone great reforms become practicable. Such a party is open to all who, without entire political conviction, but in

deference to the needs of social circumstances, loyally accept the consequences of its principles."

The speech became a landmark in the history of republican doctrine, but at the moment it was chiefly notable for its effect on the relations between Gambetta and Thiers. In March the two men were at opposite poles, Thiers for immediate peace, Gambetta for a new war; and Thiers was at pains to emphasize their divergence. With his uncanny penetration, he had at once seized on the essential quality of the Assembly, its belief in parliamentary sovereignty, and its consequent hatred of any form of dictatorship whether imperialist or republican. In constructing a coalition cabinet Thiers had allowed for the Assembly's attitude. He had given portfolios to three members of the Government of National Defence, but they were the three whose variance with Gambetta was notorious. The vacant Ministry of the Interior was pointedly assigned to Picard who had claimed it on 4 September, but had been passed over in Gambetta's favour; Jules Simon, the emissary from Paris, who had brought about Gambetta's final resignation, became Minister of Public Instruction; above all, Favre, who had signed the fatal armistice in the name of France and not of Paris only, was confirmed in his post at the Foreign Office. At a time when foreign affairs were all-important the choice of Favre was rightly interpreted as setting up the strongest personal obstacle to communications between the Government and the war party. But, during Gambetta's absence in Spain, Thiers had taken his first definite step towards the Republic. In the early days of the Commune municipal deputations had waited on him with anxious enquiries whether the unrest in Paris meant that the Republic was in danger. If the Assembly contemplated restoring the Monarchy, Paris, it was intimated, would not be alone in its protest. The Chief of the Executive Power realized that the maintenance of public order in the great towns of France depended on the terms of the reply, and his language was explicit. He gave a definite pledge that he would never lend himself to the subversion of the existing régime. Bismarck, recognizing Thiers's immense hold on France, amused himself by references to Adolph the First; but France herself knew better. It saw in Thiers's presence at the head of affairs not the beginnings of a Monarchy, but a sure bulwark against its establishment. Nevertheless Thiers had not declared himself a republican; on the contrary

he had proclaimed himself the prop of a provisional republic ; and it remained to be seen how this non-committal attitude would be regarded by republicans of conviction. Gambetta's Bordeaux speech settled this difficult issue in a statesmanlike fashion equally satisfactory to his party and to Thiers. Since he was working for a permanent Republic, he was necessarily in opposition to a provisional system of government. But his opposition was wholly constitutional, and aimed at the creation of a moderate constructive party. In face of this language it became impossible for any " conservative " to use Gambetta as a scarecrow and to go to the poll declaring himself at once a royalist and a supporter of Thiers. The situation at the moment of the elections was that Thiers had declared himself republican and the republican leader had declared himself Thierist. Their united forces swept the board. In 111 contests 100 republicans were returned, Gambetta among them ; and the majority of the Assembly noted with alarm that republicans were successful in twenty-two out of the twenty-five seats vacated by Thiers himself.

The course of events was soon to bring the two republican sections to the verge of alliance. Gambetta was not the only Frenchman who had returned to France in the last week of June. The Comte de Chambord had also crossed the frontier to spend a few days at the castle from which he took his title. He, too, was impressed by the strength of republican feeling, and he too resolved to make his attitude clear to France. On 7 June he issued his famous manifesto—the first of the declarations which were to exclude him from the throne. The Comte de Chambord had a gift of picturesque and effective phrase. He used it to proclaim his devotion to the Bourbon flag. Its lilies had floated over his cradle ; he hoped that they would cast their shadow over his tomb ; the standard of Henri IV would never drop from the hands of Henri V. On 12 July the Assembly, still staggered by this uncompromising language, had to debate a matter vitally affecting the policy of the Catholic Monarchy. The French Bishops had presented a petition that the Government should negotiate with other states for the restoration of the Temporal Power, lost the previous September ; the majority of the Assembly was obviously sympathetic ; and Thiers felt it essential that he should retain it from passing any embarrassing resolution. He told the House in good round terms that it must not set France

upon a course which could only end in war with the Italian kingdom. The majority, duly cowed, tabled a resolution which avoided all reference to the petition, but expressed confidence in the prudence and patriotism of the Chief of the Executive Power. Thereupon Gambetta, who was not the man to let slip a chance for a fine parliamentary stroke, announced that his party would accept the resolution. The right flew into uproar. As good Catholics its members could not support a resolution endorsed by an anti-clerical. Thiers intervened with frigid anger. The meaning of the resolution was plain, he said, and could not be changed by the adherence of this or that deputy. But the right would not listen to reason. A new resolution was introduced and carried, which, while still affirming confidence in Thiers, referred the main question back to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Favre, who had already intimated that he could not act in the sense of the petition, at once resigned. Thus the issue which had brought Gambetta and Thiers into practical harmony also removed the main personal obstacle to their co-operation. Thiers himself paved the way to an understanding by appointing Remusat as Favre's successor. Remusat was, indeed, a monarchist; but he was neither an active politician nor even a member of the Assembly, and his selection was inspired by a confidence based on long and intimate private friendship. He was clearly a man to whom Gambetta could talk if need arose.

Domestic policy saw further progress towards republican union. The Commune had made imperative some definite organization of the local life of France. The Assembly addressed itself to the question in practical broad-minded fashion, and enacted a law whose wisdom has been endorsed by the experience of fifty years. Its main provision gave departmental feeling an adequate organ of expression through departmental assemblies elected by universal suffrage.¹ The first elections to the *Conseils généraux*, as these assemblies were termed, proved another republican landslide. Out of a total of nearly 3000 councillors, two-thirds were republicans of a more or less pronounced colour, the rest being mostly Orleanists.

Such was France's answer to the manifesto of 7 July. Gambetta saw in the elections another proof that the Revolu-

¹ Votes for women had not yet become a practical issue in French politics. In 1871 as in 1848 universal suffrage meant in substance that every Frenchman received a vote when he came of age.

tion had entered on its closing phase of mature, constructive work. In an open letter he laid down the lines of policy to be pursued by these new republican bodies. The republican victory, he declared, was too complete to admit of controversy or contradiction. The Councils had therefore no ground for political action. Their business was not to demand the Republic, but to administer France, and the letter went on to review the whole field of departmental administration, and to indicate the work to be done. It was a document which Thiers could read with entire approval.

But the main issue was neither Italian nor departmental. The future of France depended on her attitude towards Germany. On this crucial issue the language of the Bordeaux speech had been restrained but clear. Having made peace France must accept its conditions. Gambetta never wavered from this attitude. It was not in him to tout for cheap applause by rhetoric about the day that would dawn. The past was the past, both for himself and for France, and the Lost Provinces had become matter for thought but not for speech. Gambetta was himself most reluctant to break the silence which he advocated, but the persistence of his opponents in representing him as a firebrand working for a new war compelled a last emphatic declaration. It took dramatic form. There waited on him in May 1872 a deputation from Alsace-Lorraine, to present him with a piece of symbolical bronze, the work of Bartholdi, himself an Alsatian, which had been bought for him by general subscription throughout the Lost Provinces. (It is now at Les Jardies, and Gambetta's heart was buried beneath it.) Gambetta thanked the donors in terms which he specifically desired to be made widely known. Both France and Europe, he said, were at present incomplete; the problem was to make them both whole again. The solution lay in republicanism, charged as it was with moral weight in the world's affairs. Restoration spelt revolution, but the Republic could build France up until she might hope to secure her rights by sheer moral force, without drawing the sword. Meanwhile the Lost Provinces must be patient and resigned under their burden. At all costs they must refrain from action which would hamper France in her long effort to become herself again.

The speech, bravely delivered under the most painful circumstances, was a noble gesture of acquiescence and hope, and

Europe paid due heed to it. Two years later Gambetta, seeking, as was his wont, relaxation in foreign travel, found himself in Amsterdam. With Ranc, who was his travelling companion, and who tells the story, he went to an evening concert at a café. The audience was stolid and the programme dull. But presently the whisper of the visitor's identity went round, and, after the band had played the Marseillaise, there stepped on to the stage a young woman dressed all in black save for the tricolour sash about her waist. She sang a song which had lately been stirring France—"The Alsatian School-master."

" La patrouille allemande passe—
Baissez les voix, mes chers petits.
Parler français n'est plus permis
Aux petits enfants de l'Alsace. . . ."

In truth there were two sides to Gambetta's Alsatian policy. To France it preached endurance and hard work, but to Europe it was a ringing protest against an outrage on the public conscience. Bismarck recognized both sides, and treated Gambetta at his convenience, now as the fanatical advocate of a war of revenge and now as the practical man who bowed to the force of facts. But in 1871 Bismarck still preferred to maintain the studied contempt which he had shown towards Gambetta during the armistice negotiations, and held it beneath his dignity to notice the steps which a mere agitator might be taking to ingratiate himself with the head of the French Government. So far as Berlin was concerned the way was clear for a republican understanding with all that it might imply for the future of France.

XV

THE BREACH WITH THIERS

AN accommodation was not reached. Thiers himself wrecked the prospect by raising a constitutional issue, which drove Gambetta into the liveliest antagonism. The policy of the Chief of the Executive was to liberate France. But payment of the indemnity would not of itself secure this end. The Germans had undertaken to restore Belfort when the peace terms were fully carried out, and it was Thiers's besetting anxiety that they would repudiate their pledge on the ground that a new war was impending with a France about to fall a prey either to clerical reaction or to red revolution. To overcome this danger Thiers planned to constitute a definite republican Government about himself—the process to be complete by the time that the last instalment of the indemnity was paid. Late in August 1871 he made a beginning of his scheme by proposing to the Assembly that it should declare itself constituent, and in virtue of its power should confirm him in office for three years with the title of President. Gambetta distrusted the scheme, holding, with some justice, that it would pave the way for the establishment of a constitutional monarchy when once death had removed the intractable Comte de Chambord. Moreover, as a matter of principle, he declined to accept a Republic at the hands of a monarchist body. No doubt should attach to its authority; it must be proclaimed by the sovereign voice of France. Gambetta therefore denied the Assembly any right to declare itself constituent. It had been elected to decide between peace and war. Having made peace, its duty was to give place to a new Assembly elected on the clear constitutional issue. But the Assembly voted him down, and Gambetta then resolved to force a dissolution by rousing republican sentiment throughout the country. In November he founded his newspaper and launched the full republican programme in

a speech at St Quentin. It was a most comprehensive utterance. It enunciated principles; it set out policy; and it formally challenged the authority of the Assembly. But it is also noteworthy for its contention that the Republic, despite its controversial policies, could be all things to all Frenchmen. This is the first glimpse of the opportunism which was so often laid to Gambetta's charge in later years. The speech opened, according to Gambetta's favourite practice, with a broad general statement. "France needs a Government suited to all her needs and in particular to her special task of resuming her proper place in the world. But on this topic let us be very cautious. Let us not utter any rash word. That would suit ill with the dignity of the vanquished; for even the vanquished have a dignity when their fall is the act of fate not the consequence of their own misdeeds. Let us maintain this dignity, never naming the foreigner, but making the world aware that he is always in our thoughts."¹ But a Government capable of discharging this delicate mission can only emerge when the Caesarian democracy which allowed itself to be corrupted into supporting the Empire has been converted into a genuine democracy which will maintain the Republic out of moral rectitude. Conversion can be achieved by a system of education "universal, compulsory, gratuitous, and—to use an unfashionable word—entirely secular. . . . Hence it is that I have always set popular education at the head of the reforms in the republican programme, but such education must be imbued with the temper of modern politics, and must conform to the institutions and prerogatives of modern society. Let me express to you my whole mind on this subject. What I wish from the bottom of my heart is the separation not only of the churches from the State but of the schools from the Church. I regard this as essential to political, and even to social, stability." His challenge thus definitely uttered, Gambetta, like the consummate politician that he was, addressed himself to mitigating the first shock of his words. He began by pleading that so far from attacking religion, he was really strengthening the Church by seeking to confine it to its proper domain of faith. This concession to clericalism—the key to which was never indicated to the public until after Gambetta's death—

¹ This sentence contains the germ of the proverbial phrase "*n'en parler jamais, en penser toujours*" (never on our lips, always in our hearts), which defined Gambetta's Alsatian policy.

was developed at length, and with an energy which must have puzzled his hearers. At last the orator, conscious that he was growing sophistical, made a fresh start with a vigorous appeal to the Voltairean spirit with which he was himself in sympathy. "The revolutionary system sought to make states and society depend on the supremacy of reason over submission, holding that it was better to be a citizen than a slave. In place of the clerical doctrine which familiarizes the mind with a Providence guarding the secrets of its own likes and dislikes, and which insists that man is but a plaything in God's hand, the Revolution teaches that right reason is sovereign, that the will of man is decisive and responsible, that action is free, and that all the agonies and sorrows of mankind are traceable to man's ignorance or man's mistakes. For eighty years these two systems have stood face to face. They have disputed the allegiance of mankind, and have waged in the very heart of society an internecine conflict whence results that lack of system in our education, which has robbed society of its equilibrium so that it oscillates between outbreak and repression, between anarchy and despotism. The contradiction can only be resolved if public education holds itself aloof from every sort of doctrine. Leave to the Churches the religious world: but our world to which we must devote our talents, our energies, our lives, is a modern world which rejects theocratic authority . . . which thirsts after knowledge, truth, freedom, equality, which seeks to declare and discharge social duties by emancipating and exalting the humanity common to high and low alike." In an audacious passage Gambetta went on to commend his position to the rural mind by claiming the support of the lower clergy. The Church, he argued, had lost its national character with the disappearance of the Monarchy, and its heads, now thoroughly ultramontane, treated the inferior clergy almost as chattels. Gambetta dissociated himself from their haughty attitude towards "humble servants, who, after a training all too short, limited and incomplete, return to the bosom of the sturdy, healthy peasantry whence they are drawn. They are of the democracy. They have lately proved themselves ardent patriots. In their hearts they are republicans. Let us uplift these 'lower' clergy, and free them from their servitude."

French thought has the defects of its qualities. Convinced of the logic of his own justification of the modern spirit,

Gambetta failed to realize that there were minds to which it would make no appeal. His argument thus led him to call on the "men of the past"—the reference was to the majority of the Assembly—to rally to the Republic. "Their party stands for a condition of things which has perished; as a party it is utterly dissolved. But it is open to its adherents to identify themselves with the ideals of our own day and to abandon aspirations which have lost their force and are done with for ever. For our part let us not forget the noble pages which their ancestors have written in French history, pages which themselves urge their descendants of to-day to fit themselves to the needs of modern France. To continue, eighty years after the Revolution, to work for the return of a system destroyed by the gathered forces of French society is to stand self-condemned to helpless and hopeless isolation. There is but one course for these conservatives to take. Let them realize that of all forms of government republicanism is the most generous, and that under it such scope will be given to their abilities, gifts, and learning that they will become the brightest ornaments of the State."

In spite of this closing appeal Gambetta probably knew in his heart that his speech would outrage the right. But at least his peroration saved him from open conflict with Thiers. In the following session, however, practical differences became manifest. There was the question of finance. Thiers, a protectionist of the national school, inclined to the taxation of raw materials; Gambetta, who favoured free trade on idealistic grounds, supported an income tax which Thiers deprecated as imposing too great a burden on agriculture. There was the question of defence. Thiers was in favour of a small army with a long term of enlistment; Gambetta stood for universal service and three years with the colours. A compromise, universal service, with generous exemptions, for a five-year period, was finally reached, not without controversy. Gambetta's firm attitude on this question alarmed Bismarck. He dropped a hint, which the French Ambassador at once conveyed to Thiers, then busy with his plans for the great loan which should finally liberate France, that Berlin regarded the militarist patriot with uneasiness.

The progressive radicalism of Gambetta's speeches had already raised the fury of the right. During the spring recess he had scoffed at the royalists and had been insistent for a

dissolution. What was perhaps worse he had uttered the pregnant truth that while universal suffrage was the principle of a democratic Republic, it was the rival of a Monarchy based on divine right. But in this very speech Gambetta had been at pains to convince the Government that he was no fanatical revolutionary. "Beware of the Utopia-mongers," he cried, "men who, duped by their visions and steeped in their own ignorance, believe in some cure-all, some spell which, once uttered, will make the world well again. Believe me, there is no one social remedy because there is no one social question. There are a series of problems to solve. . . . They must be dealt with one by one ; there is no master-phrase that will conjure them all away." Thiers could find no fault with such language as this. But the hint from Berlin affected his attitude and when the autumn recess came round he resolved on a breach with Gambetta which, by gratifying the right, should entice it into constituting the Republic.

That autumn Gambetta had planned a tour in Savoy, to open with a dinner at Chambéry on 22 September, the anniversary of Savoy's incorporation in the First Republic eighty years before. The advertisement of this dinner in the local press led the Government to prohibit it as an illegal public meeting. The prohibition was a mistake. It turned Gambetta's tour into a triumphal progress, the people flocking in from miles around to catch a glimpse of him. Gambetta was not slow to improve the occasion by insisting that the terms of the prohibition should be strictly complied with, by way of demonstrating the republican claim to be a party of law and order. At the same time he did not fail to point out that the Government was invoking a Bonapartist law and that its action was an offence against the Republic. Republicanism, he explained, governed neither by unanimity nor by discipline but by the opinion of the majority revealed in free discussion, But it was precisely this free discussion that had been forbidden. There could be but one explanation of the Government's action. It was that the Assembly was near its end and that the right was striving to prevent the republican opposition from consolidating. Gambetta urged his hearers to take the hint and to organize and proselytize with a view to the coming elections. The outlook was wholly favourable, for the party had tremendous forces behind it. "The structure of the republican party," he declared at Chambéry on 24 September, "is the same as that of modern

French society. For, gentlemen, there is a modern French society. Its emergence is a comparatively recent feature of our history and the failure of our opponents to appreciate it is the principal cause of the evils now oppressing us. If it were but understood in the royalist camp that 1789 and its heroic, tragic consequences, had brought not only into the range of our ideas, but into the facts of our lives, into their interests, their human relationships, their social direction, a whole new population which had hitherto counted for nothing, I venture to say that half our problems would be solved." Two days later, at Grenoble, Gambetta elaborated this idea in the third and last of the great speeches which constitute the charter of the present French Republic. It is the speech in which the future knocks at the door. "For forty-five years," Gambetta said, "certain sections of French society have refused to make up their minds not only about the Revolution but about its practical consequences. They will not admit that monarchy is done with and that all the various monarchical expedients are doomed. It is in this weakness in face of the facts which distinguishes so many of our upper class that I find the cause of, and the key to, our national misfortunes. . . . Yet how can these good folk shut their eyes to a sight which ought to strike them. When the Empire fell did they not see the rise of a new and competent generation, eager but self-controlled, passionate for justice, most regardful of the general right? Have they not seen this new generation take its place among our local authorities, penetrate by degrees into our higher representative institutions, assert and maintain its position—its ever more prominent position—in our political controversies? . . . Have they not seen the workers of town and country, the world of workers to which the future belongs, make formal entry into political life? And does not their entry give notice that France, after due experience of other forms of government, is turning to a new caste to make trial of republicanism. Gentlemen, I foresee, I perceive, I proclaim the emergence and the presence in our politics of a new social caste. It has been in power for eighteen months and, believe me, it is no less capable than its predecessors.

"The new force is at work in the local bodies which are daily becoming more practiced in their conduct of affairs; and every resolution they pass, every decision they reach, carries its special quality, its individual accent, and has its bearing on the whole government of France. The democracy of to-day has left

behind the somewhat misty sentimentalities of the last generation. It has brought with it an atmosphere more definite, more practical and—forgive the offensive word which exactly expresses my thought—more scientific.”

The speech closed with a passage in which philosophy was most effectively blended with ridicule. How did the conservatives meet these facts? They met them by shrieking that radicalism was at the gates with its train of horrors and disasters. This was another example of the political poltroonery which was the chronic disease of France. In its eagerness for delivery from the spectres of its own imagining, society had brought about Empire, Restoration, and Second Empire. It was in the same spirit of cowardice that the Assembly, with the sexton waiting outside to drop a clod of earth on its coffin, now proposed to celebrate a deathbed marriage with a conservative Republic.

In this language, uncompromising though it was, there was no attack on Thiers. On the contrary Gambetta was aware of the great work he was doing for France and, when the President's name was once toasted at a dinner, seized the opportunity of eulogizing his services. Had Thiers himself been less self-confident, he would have been taught by an incident of this very tour that Gambetta was a patriot with whose co-operation he could not afford to dispense. At a town near the Swiss border Gambetta was greeted by representatives of republican societies from both sides of the frontier. Among them was a group from Alsace-Lorraine. Gambetta received them privately, began a speech in which he sought to analyse the contributions of the two provinces to French history and French thought, faltered and broke down. That night Gambetta's health was proposed by a leading Savoyard who hinted that if France passed under a clerical monarchy republican Savoy might attach herself to Switzerland. Gambetta's moving and impassioned reply came straight from the heart. True, there had been a glorious France of which any man might be proud to proclaim himself a citizen. But there was another France, broken, humiliated, abused, trailing her fetters through the centuries, bleeding in her pursuit of great ideals. “That France I reverence as a mother.”

The Assembly met in November, a month after Gambetta had concluded his tour with the speech which filled the cup of his misdeeds by stigmatizing clericalism as the enemy. The

right thirsted for his blood and Thiers, with the liberation of France in sight, thirsted for a definitive Republic. The old President played a tortuous game. Determined as ever to get his Republic out of the Assembly in spite of itself, he accepted a resolution denouncing the Grenoble speech as the price of the majority's agreement to set up a committee which should draft a constitution. Still Gambetta forebore. "I am fairly satisfied and reassured," he wrote to his father at the turn of the year, "that the monarchists' designs will miscarry. M. Thiers will either end by forcing them to capitulate or else will dissolve them. Meanwhile he keeps them busy with one hand, while with the other he pays the Prussians and shortens the period of occupation, in other words, hastens the hour of dissolution for which at the bottom of his heart he longs even more ardently than we do. The country advances each day a step nearer the Republic. Even the most indifferent citizens are rallying; and we have every reason to believe that the great voice of France will make itself heard in May or June and then everyone will be put in his proper place. Until then we must be very cautious and work very hard."

It was not till February that Gambetta realized that Thiers meant his constitutional projects to come to their issue. The crisis came over a proposal to set up a Second Chamber. Gambetta objected that it could serve no purpose to thwart and hamper the action of the First Chamber, the product of universal suffrage, and that rivalry between the two bodies would be mischievous for France. Thiers persisted, and even sought to get a vote of confidence in his policy from republican Paris itself. A seat had fallen vacant and the President insisted that his foreign Minister, Remusat, should come forward as a candidate. It happened that a municipal law had lately been under discussion and the Government's decision to nominate the mayors of the great towns was unpopular in Paris. A radical, Barodet by name, was put up to oppose the administration on this issue. After a little hesitation Gambetta decided to support Barodet. The speech in which he declared himself transformed the whole character of the election. He invited Paris to condemn a Government which had refused to introduce secular education, had whittled away the universality of military service, and had rejected the democratic financial policy of an income tax. But above all he demanded a clear condemnation by the people of the refusal to dissolve and of the attempt

by lobby intrigues to saddle the country with a sort of constitution. The whole question of confidence in Thiers was thus definitely raised and all France felt the election to be critical. The campaign was fought with unparalleled energy on both sides. Paris was roused by the first real event which had broken the gloomy dullness of its life since the Commune and its walls were plastered and replastered with the posters now used for the first time in a French election. On a heavy poll the President's Foreign Minister and personal friend was defeated by 45,000 votes. The breach between Thiers and Gambetta was complete.

XVI

THE MONARCHIST ADVENTURE

THE crisis gave the right its opportunity. With Thiers and Gambetta at daggers drawn the Republic could not be constituted, the Monarchy might be restored. Thiers played into his opponent's hands by his last desperate effort. In the hope that the majority might be terrified by the Paris election into support of a scheme for consolidating the Republic about himself, he reconstituted his Ministry. With one exception, all the members of the new Cabinet were moderate republicans. But the Paris election had occurred in the recess ; the right had a month in which to mature its plans ; when the House reassembled, it expressed its dissatisfaction with the new ministers, and Thiers at once resigned.

He was succeeded, according to plan, by Marshal MacMahon, a loyal soldier whose reputation gave bail that his monarchist sympathies would not let him connive at any *coup d'état*. His relative, the Duc de Broglie, headed the Government. He stood, as he declared with evident sincerity, for order against revolution, political order, social order, above all, moral order. For the Duc de Broglie was more than the Machiavelli of the lobbies that Gambetta called him. Deriving his politics from his faith, he held that the lawlessness of the Revolution proceeded from its contempt of the Church, base and prop of all law. To him more than to any man—for his spirit dominated his party—is due the extreme bitterness with which the Church fought Gambetta's plan for secular education. For the rest, a tactician rather than a leader, a reluctant speaker with the scholar's dislike of the sweeping assertions of rhetoric, an aristocrat without passion and with a profound belief in the healing effects of time. Towards restoration he showed complacency without enthusiasm. He was too shrewd to believe in its prospect ; but the idea chimed in well with moral order, and time bestowed on it would be well spent.

The right, on the other hand, had no time to lose. Its members realized that the temper of France was thoroughly hostile to their schemes. But for the moment the republican opposition was not unanimous. If the right could effect a fusion while the patent disunion of the left continued to shock the country, the restored Monarchy might yet be accepted as the only bulwark against the menace of a restored Empire. In this spirit there was elaborated what the jargon of Versailles termed the policy of bringing the King to the foot of the throne. It was assumed that to the end of his compulsory journey His Majesty would make no difficulty about mounting its steps. These royalists little knew their King.

The plan involved the repetition on an extended scale of the tactics which had successfully ousted Thiers. During the two months of the session the majority would learn to act solidly behind the Ministry; the Ministry meanwhile would work powerfully on opinion by the exercise of its enormous departmental patronage, and by the suppression of cantankerous republican journals. During the recess pressure would be exercised on the Bourbon princes to heal the schism that had rent their house since 1830, and, a reconciliation accomplished, the conditions of restoration could be arranged. When the House reassembled all would be ready for the proclamation of Henry V. In fact, with a little deft management, the King would have come into his own again before France fully realized what was toward.

The first step was discouraging. Scarcely had the new Cabinet met the House when a member of the left raised a debate on the suppression of a republican newspaper. The majority was ready to cheer the first fruits of the moral order, but the Minister of the Interior wrecked a promising situation by a most unhappy phrase. He referred to the Assembly as elected by France in an evil hour. With laughter and cat-calls the left took up his words. It was indeed in an evil hour, they shouted, that France had elected such an Assembly. The disconcerted minister stammered out a few more sentences amid the ironical cheers of the left. Then, while the impression made by the blunder was still fresh, Gambetta mounted the tribune and read an official circular to the departmental prefects, instructing them to inquire into the finances of local opposition papers and to report the names of those which could be bought over. The Government was only saved by the assurance of

the Minister of the Interior that he knew nothing of the circular ; the Under-Secretary responsible for it was compelled to resign. It was a bad beginning.

Even less successful were the efforts of the right to widen the divisions of the left. Twice, without warning, Gambetta was challenged to explain his reference to the new social castes in his Grenoble speech—the speech on which his followers took their stand, but which Thiers had openly condemned. But Gambetta was not to be caught. He had always been reluctant to break with Thiers, whose exclusion from the republican party at once discredited its claim to the support of moderate and patriotic citizens. He had therefore resolved to make the claim good by placing himself under Thiers' leadership and the attacks of his opponents gave him his opportunity. To the first challenge he replied with an adroit speech, in which, without withdrawing the obnoxious phrase, he stripped it of its suggestion of class warfare. His language, he explained, had reference to the facts of 1789 and 1848. In those memorable years democracy had asserted its power, and, since the old governing classes had refused to lead it, had found men in its own ranks to carry its will into effect. In fact the new social castes were no more than the concrete expression of the now accepted principle of universal suffrage. Here was an unmistakeable overture to the man who had expressed himself a republican by force of circumstance. But when challenged a second time Gambetta went further. Thiers was an Orleanist at heart, and when he first took office had admitted that he would rather look across the Channel than across the Atlantic for the solution of France's domestic problems. But since Thiers was now committed to the transatlantic solution, his former preference could be pointedly recalled, and Gambetta's allusion to it was a feat of great political dexterity. Protesting against the wild meanings that had been read into his language, he appealed for English fair play. The use of the two English words reminded him that in England public meetings, such as he had been blamed for addressing, afforded a recognized and approved method of conducting political controversy. The argument was fully appreciated at the address to which it was directed. Thiers had no further use for the Assembly, and Gambetta had his tacit support in the demand for a dissolution which he put forward with his usual vehemence as the time for the summer adjournment drew

near. But the republicans were not strong enough to pass to the offensive. The Duc de Broglie countered with the dry and effective retort that as the Assembly had come into existence without Gambetta's permission, it did not require it in order to continue to govern France. The phrase delighted the majority, but its more enlightened members realized that in the race for reunion the republicans had gained on the monarchists. A leader was required to pull the groups on the right together, and it was obviously futile to look for him in a Cabinet whose head was content to mark time.

The Duc d'Audriffet-Pasquier, a man with a great name, a clear head, and a sharp tongue, essayed the task. Himself an Orleanist, he could force his party to make the first move, and early in August Europe was thrilled to learn that the Comte de Paris had visited the Comte de Chambord, and had formally greeted him not only as the head of his House, but as the only legal claimant to the throne. The republicans waited in anxiety for the next move. It was not made; two months slipped by and with October the time of the supreme crisis had evidently arrived. Suspecting a hitch, the republicans took heart of grace and consolidated their alliance. At the end of September Thiers returned from a holiday in Switzerland. His homeward journey took him through the departments recently liberated from the enemy, and he was rapturously welcomed. Back in Paris, he addressed his thanks to the Mayor of Nancy in an open letter, dwelling on the imminent danger of a monarchist restoration, which would threaten whatever liberties France had won since 1789. That week Gambetta delivered the only two speeches of his autumn campaign, both of them short and both indicative of the intense anxiety under which he was labouring. In the first he recurred to his favourite theme of the services which republicanism had rendered France. In coming, as it had come in 1871, to the rescue of a country "broke to every known mischance," it was but fulfilling its traditions. What was modern France, he asked, if not the Republic? Developing this theme in his second speech he commended his cause to all patriots and pleaded for a Republic which should stand for the alliance of the bourgeoisie with the proletariat.¹ On 12 October republican victories in all the four bye-elections then pending showed that the plea had not

¹ The last sentence of this speech, an appeal for the union of republicans of yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow, is a good illustration of Gambetta's power

been urged in vain, and five days later the republican reconciliation was made complete. Paris had been the scene of the breach, and, to heal it, all the deputies of the Seine Department, including not only Gambetta but the extremist republican, Louis Blanc, put their names to a manifesto, in which Thiers was hailed as interpreting the feelings of all France. Thiers thus became the leader of the now united opposition, and Gambetta demonstrated his loyalty by retiring into the background. It was nearly nine months before he made another public speech.

The republican consolidation was perfected in the nick of time. On the day that the Paris manifesto was issued, the Duc d'Audriffet-Pasquier's committee had drafted the resolutions by which the Assembly was to restore the monarchy. The draft had issued from delicate negotiations. The Comte de Chambord had made it clear that he did not regard the withdrawal of the Orleanist claim as involving the abandonment of the Orleanist policies. On the contrary the King accepted the modern devices, parliamentary institutions, responsible ministers, universal suffrage, which would assist him to rule in harmony with the wishes of his people. But on one point he was adamant; he could not recognize the tricolour flag of the Revolution. After his return to France, he would take up the question with the army. The reference to the army was reported to MacMahon, who sent an energetic message to the Duc d'Audriffet-Pasquier. If the white flag was hoisted, he declared in a phrase which has become famous, the rifles would go off of themselves. A similar intimation, couched in more decorous language, was conveyed to the Comte de Chambord's secretary by the Marshal's aide-de-camp. As Chief of the Executive Power, MacMahon would admit no trifling with the internal order of France.

At the beginning of October the Duc d'Audriffet-Pasquier had called his committee together, and proposed a resolution that the tricolour should be respected. The legitimists sadly declared that the King would never accept such a condition. It was then that M. Chesnelong, a hitherto obscure deputy, felt that his moment had come. He was a business man with a business man's instinct for a bargain, and for the terms which made a bargain possible. He proposed that the question of the flag of packing meaning into an apparently rhetorical phrase. He was himself the spokesman of the republicans of yesterday while Thiers, a converted Orleanist, was a republican of to-day. The republicans of to-morrow had reference to the many distinguished moderates who, while regarding Thiers as in some sense their leader, had not yet abandoned hope of a constitutional monarchy.

should be settled by agreement between the King and the Assembly. The Duc d'Audriffet-Pasquier accepted the proposal, and M. Chesnelong was sent off to gain the King's consent. He returned on the 16th, and reported the result of his audience, his account of which can now be read in his book. The King could not accept the compromise in so many words ; it placed him too much at the mercy of the Assembly. But after his return he would make proposals which he hoped would be satisfactory both to his own honour and to the nation. There was a fundamental misunderstanding. The Comte de Chambord had agreed to make proposals ; he was taken to have accepted conditions. But a formula had been found, and the Pasquier committee drafted its resolution which proclaimed the monarchy, gave the heads of a constitution, and forecasted an agreement about the flag.

There followed two anxious hesitating days. The Royal uniform was prepared, the Royal carriages built¹ ; all France was on tenterhooks, and every politician in the country had his own calculation of how the doubtful members of the Assembly would vote. But rumours of what was projected began to appear in the press ; the Comte de Chambord was shocked to read in a semi-official statement that he was prepared to bargain about the flag.² The mystic that was in him told him that the heart of France was yearning towards him at last ; its movement must not be checked by narrow-minded politicians. The King would reveal his whole thought to his people. In a letter to M. Chesnelong, a copy of which was sent to the legitimists' Paris newspaper,³ with a royal command for immediate publication, the Comte de Chambord rent the web of illusion and intrigue. His right, he declared, though not arbitrary, was absolute ; therefore he could not become king under conditions. Since sovereignty resided in himself, he could not accept a throne which was the gift of a sovereign Parliament nor a flag which was the symbol of a sovereign people. The letter, as a royalist said, shattered a dream.

¹ The Comte de Chambord decided to make one concession to the Revolution ; he would enter Paris wearing the Legion of Honour, not the Golden Fleece. But in the centre of the star that was stamped for him the Imperial eagle was replaced by the Bourbon fleur-de-lys.

² The word in the statement which caused the mischief was " transaction."

³ The letter was published on the afternoon of 30 October. That evening Thiers was at home to his friends. Standing with his back to the fireplace he read the choicest passages aloud. " I wish I could see Pasquier's face now " was his comment when he had done. It was a heavy face with most dignified side-whiskers, and the words called up a delightfully ludicrous image of the consternation prevailing in the monarchist camp.

The Assembly met a week after the publication of the fatal letter, to be confronted at once with the consequences of its failure. France was excited and alarmed. The events of October had shown that the Government was too unstable to resist a lobby conspiracy. It must therefore be made stronger, and the first step was obviously to make it more permanent. The crestfallen majority were prepared to vote whatever the Duc de Broglie proposed ; but the Duc de Broglie declined to propose anything. He governed in the name of the majority and the initiative must come from its members. Failing it, the left would take control and force a full-blown Republic. Caught in its own trap, the right proposed that the Marshal's period of office, at present conterminous with the life of the Assembly, should last for another ten years, irrespective of any dissolution. It was an act of surrender to Gambetta and to the public opinion which he had shaped and organized.

The Comte de Chambord knew nothing of Gambetta and his power. Unable to realize that his cause was lost, he resolved on what was for him a supreme act of self-abnegation. He had proclaimed himself ready to serve his country when she called him ; now he would go farther and offer himself to France. On 9 November, the King crossed the Swiss frontier on to French soil. Next day he reached Versailles in strict incognito and took up his quarters in a little house hard by the palace of his ancestors. Thence he sent his secretary to inform the Marshal of his arrival and of his desire to receive him in audience. It was his hope that, once in the presence, the Marshal, in an excess of loyalty, would agree to present his sovereign to the Assembly and to the people. But the honour of the Bayard of our time—the phrase is the Comte de Chambord's own and occurs in the letter to M. Chesnelong—forbade him to engage in a monarchist intrigue at the very moment when his request for fuller powers was before the Assembly. He told the secretary that he could not wait on his master. The secretary put the key of the Comte de Chambord's apartment on the table. The Marshal smiled and let it lie.

The Comte de Chambord lingered on at Versailles a few days yet, hoping for an act of God which would prevent the prolongation of the Marshal's term. There were heated debates. At 2 a.m. on 20 November the Assembly confirmed the Marshal in his office for a further seven years. Two days later the Comte de Chambord left France for ever.

XVII

THE CONSTITUTION OF 1875

THESE moving events, in which Gambetta took no direct part but which determined his future line of action and have therefore been told here, had one result of immediate benefit. They made it possible for the Assembly to approach the constitutional issue without mention of those violently controversial terms, Republic and Monarchy. There had now been established an executive power, which though not permanent, would presumably survive the Assembly itself; for even the strongest opponents of dissolution could hardly contemplate the continuance of its sessions until 1880. But if a legislative power were set up alongside this executive the framework of government would be complete and the Assembly would in some sense have discharged its self-imposed task of giving France a constitution. Henceforward, therefore, it became the convention at Versailles to assume that the Assembly would shortly avail itself of its constituent power for the purpose not of establishing a government with a definite label but of "organizing the powers of the Marshal." It was mainly because, in the last resort, this convention could no longer be observed, that the Assembly could not be brought to exercise its power for another fifteen months.

There were, however, other motives at work besides the reluctance of the majority to swallow the word Republic. 1874 and 1875 were years of great anxiety in Europe. Bismarck was alarmed at the rapidity with which France was recovering from her disasters. His alarm was increased by the difficulties and delays which he encountered in his policy of isolating France. The *Kulturkampf*—his famous conflict with the clericals—embarrassed him at home; the enmity between Austria and Russia, at a time when his policy aimed at German friendship with both, embarrassed him abroad. His way of escape was to threaten France with a "preventive" war which should forestall

her own war of revenge. The Assembly was conscious of the menace and laboured assiduously at defensive schemes which MacMahon was equally assiduous in putting into execution.

Moreover the republican majority was not yet fully formed, and Thiers and Gambetta were not at one as to its composition. Thiers wished to attract over a group of members of the right centre, Orleanist as yet, but capable, like himself, of turning republican under force of circumstances. Gambetta was profoundly distrustful of the Republic which would issue from their co-operation. It would give him, he feared, the name without the thing. Borrowing a word from Dutch history, he declared himself opposed to a stadtholdership. By this he meant a Republic whose President was clothed with monarchical prerogatives and could therefore be replaced by a constitutional king as soon as the Comte de Chambord's death gave the Orleanists a free hand. Gambetta's speeches in 1874 are full of stabs at this muzzled party—not the monarchists but the "other." His own hopes lay in an alliance with the extreme right whose members would rather vote a pure Republic than smooth the path for an eventual Orleanist succession.

This uncertainty as to the source from which the Republic should derive accounts for the perplexities which enveloped the constitutional debates of 1874, and for their failure to arrive at an issue. The breakdown was due mainly to Gambetta's uncertain tactics, to his endeavour to ride two horses at once and to strike a bargain with the extreme right while maintaining his alliance with Thiers. It may be urged in his defence that his health was exceptionally bad this summer, and that he was consequently unable to judge the situation with his usual clearness. Still, all that was asked of him was that he should abide by his decision of the previous autumn and fight under Thiers's banner. His reassertion of independence ruined a fine opportunity, for in the summer of 1874 the Assembly was ready to act. Events had occurred which made it fear that further delay would lead to the solution which it disliked most, the restoration of the Empire.

Bonapartism had begun to bestir itself in 1872. Early in the following year Napoleon III considered that the time was come to effect his return from Elba. But his internal malady made it impossible for him to sit a horse. He put himself in the hands of the surgeons and died under the operation. His death threw his party into a temporary confusion which left

the monarchists free to pursue their plan for a restoration. But with the collapse of the legitimist hopes in the autumn of 1873, the Bonapartists took new heart and began to rally round the gallant and attractive personality of the Prince Imperial. In February 1874 they fought and won a bye-election; in March there was a great gathering of the party in England to celebrate the Prince's nineteenth birthday. The young man was now of age; the regency of the unpopular Empress was at an end, and Bonapartist circles could speak of Napoleon IV. The event gave new interest to the recent electoral success. 'How had it been achieved? A deputy went to the tribune and read a circular picked up in a railway carriage. It directed that approaches should be made to all officers in the department, whether retired or on the active list, and emanated from the Paris Central Committee for an Appeal to the People. The circular was discussed in June and created an ugly parliamentary scene. Gambetta had pressed for a full judicial inquiry. Rouher, the leader of the Bonapartist group, had reported that he would show Gambetta how inquiries should be faced. Gambetta replied that he had never shirked investigation into his acts as a minister. "But," he added, "if there is one person here who has neither right nor title to demand an explanation of the Revolution of 4 September, it is the wretches who have ruined France."¹ The President called on the speaker to withdraw an expression calculated to give offence. "My expression," replied Gambetta, "was calculated not to give offence but to inflict a brand; and I maintain it." There was great disorder in the House. Next day it spread to the streets. A crowd gathered at the railway station to cheer and boo deputies on their way to Versailles by the parliamentary train. There was more turbulence the day after, and Gambetta was assaulted by a man of good family but drunken habits. It began to appear that the Bonapartists were falling back on their old plan of disturbing the public peace in order to justify their claim to be the saviours of society. The Assembly resolved to intervene and the question of organizing the Marshal's powers was again taken up.

A very delicate situation had now developed at Versailles. In the spring pressure from the left had induced the Duc de Broglie to table his constitutional scheme. It was an ingenious project for gaining time. All this talk about a constitution owed its danger to the existence of a sovereign Assembly which

¹ The curious grammar of this sentence is Gambetta's.

had claimed to be constituent. But the Assembly could shirk the difficulties inherent in any full organization of the powers of the Marshal if it made a beginning by setting up a Second Chamber. Such a Chamber could not co-exist with an Assembly enjoying absolute authority, so that the Assembly would limit its powers by the very act of exercising them. The scheme invited the support of the majority by proposing the creation of a Senate wholly representative of the interests, which should guide and check the actions of the eventual Chamber to be elected by universal suffrage. Gambetta is reported to have said of this proposal that if the right accepted it they would put democracy back for fifty years. But in the last resort the House shrank from discrediting the suffrage from which it had itself sprung, and the majority availed itself of this sentiment to avenge the humiliation which the Duc de Broglie had inflicted upon it the previous autumn. A test vote was taken on a question of procedure. The ministry was defeated and resigned. It had held office for one week under a year. After abortive negotiations which showed the absence of any clear majority in the House, the Marshal appointed a Cabinet of caretakers.

In this important division the right had voted with the left. Its action satisfied Gambetta that its members were sound on the main question of popular sovereignty, that they appreciated the impossibility of a legitimist restoration, and that the combination which had rejected a reactionary Senate might be induced to set up a national Republic. A few days later he held out his olive branch.

There had just died a republican intellectual, a strange, wild personage who had once been a peer of France. Gambetta delivered the funeral oration and expressed his regret that his subject's democratic zeal had never met with the recognition it deserved. The reason was that the masses had felt unable to trust a leader of noble birth. This suspicious attitude, declared Gambetta, must now be abandoned by the republican party if the Republic was to prove that it embraced the whole nation. A week later the argument was elaborated in a speech at Auxerre. Dealing with the situation of the moment Gambetta poured invective on the Empire and its "dirty fraud," the plebiscite. The constitutional monarchists were next overwhelmed with sarcasm, and the left centre composed of Orleanists who had seen the republican light was eulogized in terms that implied censure of the right centre, composed of Orleanists

for whose conversion Thiers was working. Gambetta went on to appeal to the politicians who for three years had thought of everything except France. Let them face the facts. While the Assembly had wavered, opinion had remained steady. It was steady still. It realized that the Republic was the only force which could oppose the Empire. But the Republic must not be the creation of a party ; it must be the national Republic of ten million electors. To be stable it must command the support of the peasant voters throughout France. To them therefore Gambetta addressed the bulk of his expositions ; but he was fully aware that it was precisely the aristocrats of the extreme right who owed their seats to the peasant vote.

Such was the position at the beginning of June when the Assembly, conscious that Bonapartism was gaining ground and that no guidance could come from a Cabinet appointed solely to carry on, resolved to make its own approach to its constitutional task. It began with the least controversial aspect of the problem, the enactment of an electoral law for local elections. A proposal was put before it to raise the voting age to twenty-five. Had it been carried, it would have formed a basis for a Republic so conservative that it would no longer have been republican in the French sense of the term. In opposing this project Gambetta performed what was perhaps the happiest of all his parliamentary feats. He went to the tribune and delivered a speech abounding in rollicking good humour. He jested with his interrupters, chaffed the Bill's sponsor, the fattest member of the House, and frolicked with his argument that the bill would confirm the sanctity of family life since the raising of the voting age would diminish the risk of political squabbles around the domestic hearth. The string on which he threaded his jokes was his conviction that the Assembly would not play traitor to the franchise which had elected it. The Assembly, which had expected a solemn protest against a violation of that ark of the democratic covenant, universal suffrage, chuckled and applauded. Not till Gambetta had resumed his seat did members realize what he had done. He had completely gone back on his old demand for a dissolution. Not only had he admitted the Assembly's constituent power, but he had assumed that this power was about to be exercised. A few days later he cheerfully dismissed as a bit of rhetoric his Grenoble reference to the sexton waiting outside.

The reactionary proposal was thrown out, but the con-

stitutional debates were now interrupted, conveniently enough from Gambetta's point of view, by his scene with Rouher and the subsequent railway-station brawl. Striking while the iron of the Bonapartist menace was still hot, Gambetta persuaded the radical left to join the left centre in frankly admitting the Assembly's constituent right. Only Louis Blanc and his fellow-extremists protested, and the left centre responded to the compliment by tabling a project for a constitution. Before the debate came on Gambetta had a further opportunity of showing his goodwill to the right. The Comte de Chambord had issued another manifesto, in which he declined to be a king who reigned, but did not govern. The quotation of these words in debate threatened hostile interruptions from the left. Gambetta moved from bench to bench imposing silence. He would not have his combination wrecked by disrespect to the man whom his new allies regarded as their legitimate sovereign.

Unfortunately for the coalition, the left centre's proposal was unmistakeably Orleanist. The cloven hoof was revealed by the prerogatives with which it sought to clothe the Marshal. He was to be empowered to dissolve the Chamber and to nominate senators. A constitutional king would demand no more, and the extreme right grew visibly restive. It was the Duc de Broglie's chance. In a clever, bitter speech he paid off the old scores he cherished against every leading member of the Assembly by demonstrating the remarkable variety of opinion now covered by the term republican. The sarcasm told, and the House declined to proceed further with the Bill. Once more the Duc de Broglie had gained time. The Assembly welcomed the respite and proposed a long recess. Gambetta protested. In a strong speech which was often in members' minds during the adjournment, he warned the Assembly that it could not hope to avoid by long prorogations the discharge of the constitutional responsibilities which it had undertaken. Its motto was order. How could there be order while France was without a constitution, while martial law prevailed in half her departments, while the republican party alone had 127 of its newspapers under the ban of the censorship? Members would now have the opportunity of consulting their constituents. Let them make the most of it. They would return to Versailles convinced that the country was wedded to universal suffrage, and that the only parliamentary form of government compatible therewith was a Republic.

During the autumn the Comte de Chambord finally clarified the situation. He formally forbade his friends to take action which would hinder or prevent the re-establishment of the Monarchy. All hope of an alliance with the extreme right was now at an end, and Gambetta accepted the necessity of completing the republican majority by recruits from the Orleanist right centre. In January, on the anniversary, as was observed, of Louis XVI's execution, the Assembly discussed the motion that the legislature should consist of a Chamber and a Senate. Gambetta had fought against any Second Chamber, but for the sake of getting the Republic had now given way. He and his friends were prepared to support the motion as amended by the insertion after "legislature" of the vital words "of the French Republic." The debate went smoothly; provocative arguments were avoided; the House seemed resigned to the inevitable. Late in the day, however, Louis Blanc insisted on speaking. Recalling memories of 1848 he announced that his conscience would not allow him to vote for a bi-cameral Republic. Passion was roused and the debate was adjourned. For once Gambetta's patience gave way. Next morning the "*République française*" printed a bitterly sarcastic leader expressing the hope that M. Blanc's conscience would prove tough enough to bear the burden he had imposed on it. The division showed how thoroughly the old republican had revived the monarchist prejudices of the House. The amendment, so carefully contrived, was rejected by twenty-three votes. After four years, nothing! That night a royalist noticed Gambetta at the railway station and was struck by the grim despair of his look.

Nevertheless the republican majority was there, and only required its Chesnelong to induce it to cohere. The needful man was found in M. Wallon, an ingenuous professor, who found a new way of introducing the fateful word. He proposed that the President of the Republic should be elected for seven years by the Chamber and Senate voting together. The title President of the Republic had no terrors. It had been conferred on Thiers. It had been conferred, and for seven years, on MacMahon. Nevertheless, M. Wallon's proposal altered the situation. It separated the title from its holder, made it impersonal, created an office and, above all, as M. Zévort explains, made permanent a transitory form of government by substituting a septennial President for a septennial Republic.

French political thought was familiar with the contention that democracy means government by a majority and in the last resort by a majority of one. The Wallon amendment was the last resort. It was carried by 353 to 352—the logical majority of one.¹ The Rubicon was crossed. That night the royalist observer noticed Gambetta again. He was unable to contain his joy.

It remained to complete the outline of the constitution. A bargain was made. The left centre agreed to deprive the President of his right to dissolve the Chamber of his own initiative, if the radical left would accept a clause enabling the constitution to be revised at any time by the two Houses sitting together. An opponent of the scheme asked searching questions. What exactly did revision mean? How far could it go? The Orleanist deputy in charge of the clause overflowed with explanations. Revision was to be taken in the widest sense. It could extend even to the form of Government. To hear the funeral service thus read over the nascent Republic was too much for Gambetta. He went to the tribune and began to make qualifications; then, realizing what was at stake, stopped and resumed his seat with the promise, which he was careful not to fulfil, that he would develop his argument on the third reading. The Duc de Broglie had a pen as caustic as his temper. In an essay on the constitution written in his disillusioned old age he used this speech that was no speech as the peg on which to hang his tribute to the greatest orator of his day.²

The composition of the Senate remained to be settled. It was understood that it was to be a mixed body, including elected senators, senators sitting by right, and senators nominated by the President. But a junction of extreme left and extreme right carried an amendment that the whole Senate should be elected by universal suffrage. The President expressed his alarm. The coalition broke up and the third reading of the constitution was rejected by 368 to 345. Again a deadlock! In his anger Gambetta rushed to the tribune to support a motion for an immediate dissolution. "We have shown you," he

¹ Our more quizzical age would perhaps suggest that in the last resort democracy means the deadlock of a tie. France was narrowly spared this trial of her political faith. A deputy was seized with sudden illness and arrived at the House just too late to record his vote. He had intended to oppose the amendment.

² M. Reinach's omission of this interrupted speech is the one flaw in his invaluable collection of Gambetta's public utterances.

cried, "a party which you have often described as uncompromising and extreme, as opposed to every accommodation and understanding : we have shown you, I say—shown you bravely and at the cost of heavy sacrifices by our leaders and teachers—that this party can co-operate with such moderates as yourselves. We said to you, 'After the defeat and collapse of your royalist hopes you must admit that it is high time to give France a constitution—a Government which you can yourselves continue to control, if you are truly and sincerely possessed of those liberal principles which you so constantly propose and so steadfastly refuse to apply.' We said to you, 'We will restrain our scruples and will take it upon ourselves to do this service to our country disturbed within and threatened from without. . . . Yes, we will take it upon ourselves to surrender to you if you will set up a moderate, anti-revolutionary constitution.' We agreed to the division of power, to the creation of a Second Chamber, to the establishment of the strongest executive ever set up in a democratic country with representative institutions. We have even given the right of dissolution to be used against the nation itself on the very morrow of its verdict. We have given you everything, have given up everything," and on the words "given up" the orator paused, mastered his feelings, and turned his argument in a way which enabled the situation to be saved. "No," he went on, "we have given up nothing because we are dealing with men of honour." But how had these honourable men been cajoled into breaking their pledge? The explanation lay in the conduct of a ministry, six times defeated but still in office, a ministry which had no policy of its own, but sheltered itself behind the Marshal's sword. Under cover of the invective heaped on the unfortunate Cabinet, which indeed had no policy but which had made no pretence to one, Gambetta impressed the Assembly with the sense of its own inalienable responsibility. Negotiations were resumed, and again M. Wallon came to the rescue. His proposal was that the President should sacrifice his right of nomination in return for the republican abandonment of election by universal suffrage. The Senate should consist of 300 members, 75 elected by the Assembly and 225 by electoral colleges composed of the departmental councils with some additional elements. By a great effort Gambetta forced this compromise on his party, whose most ardent members he induced to abandon their convictions for the sake of France. It was agreed that there should be no

speeches and no explanations. Obstruction was attempted, but beat in vain against silence. The critical division gave a majority of two hundred. After four years' delay the Assembly had constituted the Republic in less than four weeks.¹

The Assembly had now done its work but was reluctant to die; moreover the foreign situation was gloomy and there was much urgent military business to be done. November had come before it was found possible to put the finishing touches to the constitution. The House then addressed itself to the method of electing deputies, a thorny question, but of the utmost moment to a parliamentary régime. Was each department to vote collectively, returning a group of representatives (*scrutin de liste*) or was France to be broken up into constituencies each electing one member only (*scrutin d'arrondissement*)? The question of principle thus raised has ever since remained the bugbear of French politicians and was destined to harass Gambetta for the rest of his life. The departmental vote gives members greater independence and allows more play to ideas. Election by constituencies subordinates members to their electors and permits local interests to govern contests. The former system thus tends to produce more distinguished Parliaments, whereas the latter creates a closer tie between democracy and its representatives. These wider aspects of the question were not, however, prominent in the earlier debates. It was contended on the one hand that the departmental method would inaugurate the rule of the caucus, and on the other that the single-seat arrangement would allow elections to be decided by the influence of the prefect and his deputies. Gambetta himself, whose conception of democracy made him a supporter of departmental election, delivered a tactless speech in which he described the alternative as an Orleanist dodge concocted in the interests of the wealthy bourgeois whom the party would put forward as candidates. A fortnight later he sought to repair his error and pleaded for the system which would facilitate republican union and secure the return of distinguished men. He even broke his vow of silence and concluded with a reference to the Lost Provinces. But the mischief was done, and the Assembly resolved to break France up into constituencies.

¹ It is symptomatic of the time that the final vote fell within a few days of another assertion of the bright, clear Gallic spirit—the first performance of “Carmen.” By the spring of 1875 France had found herself again.

The last business before the House was the election of seventy-five of its own members to the Senate ; it brought the Assembly to an inglorious end. Gusts of party passion had repeatedly swept over its benches but had hitherto been checked in time by the thought of France and of the service due to France. That service had now been rendered ; party hatreds were unchained ; and an Assembly which had constituted the Republic in a series of debates unsurpassed for lucidity of argument and loftiness of aim in the records of any deliberative Chamber in the world, now lost all discipline and sense of purpose and degenerated into a gang of rowdies. It was decided that each senator should be elected by an absolute majority of votes. But there was no permanent majority in the House and the first day's voting returned only two candidates. In these circumstances Gambetta reverted to his old policy of a coalition with the extreme right. A group which had no following in the country would find itself unsupported in the Senate. On the other hand the form of the constitution facilitated a return to constitutional monarchy, and an Orleanist majority in the Senate might have fatal consequences to the Republic. The circumstances thus suggested the exclusion of Orleanists at any price. The right disdained the Republic but hated Orleanism ; with a little management its members could be brought to terms. A Bonapartist acted as honest broker ; a bargain was struck ; and the names of nine uncompromising legitimists were inscribed on the lists of the left. This shameless transaction, of which Gambetta was the moving spirit, turned even the Duc de Broglie's hardened stomach. The House was voting and debate was impossible. " We can hiss," said the Duc de Broglie. Amid yells and cat-calls a group of the most exclusive aristocrats in France were elected, often against their own wishes, by the votes of radical republicans. Gambetta had attained his end. Of the seventy-five senators only three belonged to the right centre. Then the Assembly fixed the date of the general election and on the last day of the year adjourned *sine die*. The Republic was founded.

XVIII

GAMBETTA'S TACTICS

THE charge of opportunism under which Gambetta's memory still labours is based upon his conduct throughout the five-year constitutional crisis which ended in the establishment of the Republic. A strong case can be brought against him. He had declared that he would not accept a Republic at the hands of such an Assembly, yet had taken a leading part in the negotiations thanks to which the Republic was voted. He had demanded a Republic of the purest type, yet had accepted what was almost a constitutional Monarchy under an alias. He had been averse to any Second Chamber and had swallowed a Senate; had demanded election by universal suffrage and had acquiesced in electoral colleges; had appealed for progressive senators and had himself voted for aristocrats; in fact, at every step had done a deal at the cost of his principles.

Gambetta himself anticipated these charges and the columns of the "*République française*" contain the justification of every step in his rake's progress. Touching his vote for the nine aristocrats, indeed, he said little; but there was little that required to be said. The bargain never pretended to be more than a political manœuvre, an act of retaliation for a concession wrung from him under pressure. From first to last Gambetta distrusted the Orleanists with whom he was forced to co-operate. They wanted a Monarchy, he a Republic; and both sought to form a Government which would meet their very different needs in the day of crisis which both awaited after the Comte de Chambord's death. In the end a formula was found which both could accept. It was fair and reasonable because it placed the decision in the hands of the people. They were admittedly sovereign; they therefore must have that last word which means so much according to French constitutional doctrine. So far, so good. But to the acceptable formula the Orleanists

appended one qualification. They insisted upon seventy-five permanent senators elected by the Assembly, evidently in the hope of perpetuating its monarchist majority in future Parliaments. It was sharp practice and Gambetta had no hesitation in meeting it by still sharper practice. Diamond cut diamond.

So much for an episode trivial in itself but the cause of riotous passion at the time. The wider issue remains. Did Gambetta nullify his own principle? The inconsistency in his acts is patent. From his return to France till the spring of 1874, he pressed for a dissolution and the election of a new Assembly with a proper constituent mandate. Then he swung round, and it was mainly as the result of his endeavours, unremittedly pursued for a whole twelvemonth, that the Assembly finally accomplished the very task which he had pronounced it incompetent to undertake. He wrote his defence in the columns of the "*République française*" immediately after he had concluded the pact which built up a constitution on the basis of the Wallon amendment. "We must be content to begin in a small way, especially as the guarantee of a sure and stable future makes our further progress certain. History, our own history in particular, teaches us that abrupt constitutional changes rarely endure. Revolutions bring in their train the reactions by which they are finally mastered and undone. Peoples must be given time to grow used to reforms even to those which are most urgently demanded. These latter, indeed, cogently illustrate the maxim that time only respects what it has helped to make.

"If there had been a repetition of 1848, if the Republic had been created in a fit of enthusiasm by an Assembly elected on the morrow of the Empire's collapse, its enemies would have exploited the fact. Reverting to their old tactics they would have assured the country day in and day out that the Republic had been sprung upon it in its irresponsible mood, and that at heart the nation had no love for it and would have chosen something very different had it been given time to collect its thoughts. Moreover the Republic would have been held accountable for all the difficulties and misfortunes inherited from the Empire, and little by little the beginning of the new system would have been confounded with the end of the old, to the prejudice of the former in the eyes of France.

"As it is, an Assembly inimical to the Republic, an Assembly whose character made it immune to republican propaganda, has held power and has held it with the deliberate intention of

restoring the Monarchy" ; and the article goes on to trace the failure of its policy, the maintenance throughout the period of transition of a form of government republican in fact though not admitted to be such, and the pleasure of the nation at discovering that the new Republic with which the Assembly was at last presenting it was nothing but the government which it had known and appreciated for four long years.

In all this there is a touch of the apologetic ; evidently Gambetta found it a little hard to explain away his past. Yet his argument is both true and statesmanlike. After all, politics is a practical art. Its business is to get results from a clash of principles. Gambetta's principle that an election should be held on the clear constitutional issue had failed to prevail against the Assembly's principle that it was its own duty to give France a constitution. The fact was patent, and Gambetta would have doomed himself to impotence and his influence to sterility had he refused to accept it. Having accepted it he compelled the Assembly to pay due regard to that public opinion on which any constitution would have to rely for its ultimate sanction. For this France owes and pays him her gratitude. But—as Gambetta himself came to realize when he looked back on events—his conduct has a deeper justification altogether independent of the circumstances of the hour. The Republic of his dreams was to be the work of the nation not of a party. Such a Republic could not emerge from an election ; the polls could only register a party triumph. But it could emerge from the Assembly. In her evil hour France turned to her best men with no thought of party in her mind. The Third Republic has never again commanded the service of such representatives as the band of patriots who came to Bordeaux, broken-hearted but with indomitable hope, to do the conqueror's bidding and to build up France out of the ruins which he left. The nation was in that Assembly as it could not be in another, and the transformation of the majority of one which founded the Republic into the majority of 200 which completed its constitution was proof that the nation, responsive to Gambetta's appeal, had rallied to the only form of government feasible in post-revolutionary France.

The only serious count of the indictment remains to be met. What can be said in defence of Gambetta's tergiversations in the matter of the Senate ? Like the brave man that he was, Gambetta sought out his worst critics and justified himself before an audience of his Paris working-class constituents. He

declared without fear of contradiction that the Republic had been founded in a way that set it above the reach of attack. It was, however, objected that this end had been attained by the sacrifice of republican ideals. Well, in politics ideals came at the end not at the beginning, and it was the fate of politicians to die before they grasped them. But it was further objected, and this was a more serious matter, that the Senate did not merely fall short of the ideals of the Republic but conformed to the ideals of reaction. He would meet that objection. Historically, indeed, a Senate was a citadel of reaction, the last refuge of those whom universal suffrage had dispossessed and rejected. The name implied a body of men of birth and wealth, landed proprietors, high Church dignitaries and the like. There had been such Senates in France both under the Monarchy and under the Empire. Their members had been illustrious as individuals, but their collective influence in affairs had been nil. Accordingly the proposal to construct yet another Senate on these lines was laughed out of court. A new basis of membership was required and the Assembly had found it in the 36,000 communes of France. A Senate so constituted would bring home to the average peasant the great fact that the Republic was now the law of the land. With his wonderful descriptive talent, Gambetta called up to his urban audience the image of a countryman about to vote for his local councillor. His immediate needs would be in his mind until suddenly the thought would strike him that his vote was matter of high politics. He was choosing a councillor; but the councillor would choose the senator. Then came the other side of the picture—the councillor returning home from the electoral college and carrying into his village some report of a discussion whose theme was the destiny of France. The term Senate was, in fact, a misnomer; really the new body was the Grand Council of the communes of France.¹

Its composition would guard the Republic against its worst danger — disunion. Traditionally the peasants distrusted republicanism as a townsmen's policy. But in the Senate the peasants would command a majority, and when they realized this their distrust would vanish. Thus, given senators of the right type, the Senate would become a mainstay of the Republic. Gambetta therefore appealed to his audience to convince Paris

¹ Before the speech Gambetta told Mme. Adam that his best hopes of convincing Belleville rested on this phrase. They were justified by its effect, which endures to this day.

of the wisdom of the policy pursued ; once convinced, Paris would herself indoctrinate France.

It reads like a piece of special pleading, but history has approved every word of it, and M. Deschanel has all the younger school of orthodox republicans with him when he cites it as the crowning illustration of Gambetta's political genius. Once and once only, in 1877, a President induced the Senate to give its consent to the dissolution of the Chamber ; but he was warned that the experiment must not be repeated. From that time onwards the two Houses have worked together in harmony. It could not be otherwise, for both spring from the people, the one directly, the other through the medium of their local representatives. With his gift of vision and his implicit confidence in universal suffrage, Gambetta foresaw the place which the Senate would fill in the working of the constitution ; and with the future thus revealed to him, he staked the last ounce of his personality in forcing the scheme on his reluctant colleagues of the radical left.

Gambetta's own final judgment on all the turmoils and compromises which had finally yielded the Republic was pronounced in March 1875 over the tomb of Edgar Quinet, himself a republican of the most unbending school. He had differed on practical issues, he admitted, with the dead man whom he revered as his master ; but their differences did not extend to their main aim—the final, definite and peaceful establishment of democracy in the framework of the political and social institutions of France.

That this aim had been realized was true ; that it could not have been realized save by Gambetta's methods was also true ; but to his own sorrow and to France's misfortune it was not the whole truth. A statesman of vision may gain his ends by means which set a dangerous example to men of lesser calibre. Opportunism has been the curse of modern French politics ; and it was Gambetta's prestige which made recurrence to it appear normal and statesmanlike. Gambetta himself strove to weld the various republican groups into a compact and united party ; he was foiled by the determination of the group leaders to bargain with him as he had bargained with the group leaders of the National Assembly. It was for evil as well as for good that he had made the Republic in his own image ; and the very qualities which had led him to his supreme achievement recoiled on him in the end and brought his career to its clouded, melancholy close.

XIX

THE CONSTITUTION TESTED

THE election was a leap in the dark. Universal suffrage had, indeed, been the law of the land for nearly thirty years, but never yet had the people been allowed to give free expression to their views. They were free now to approve or condemn the work of the National Assembly. That the vast majority of the voters were republicans had been proved by the bye-elections. But the republican constitution was, after all, a compromise. Would it be accepted as adequate by republican opinion? And what was the real strength of popular feeling behind the Bonapartist demonstrations which had alarmed the Assembly during the last two years of its existence? To these searching questions the elections gave what seemed to be an entirely satisfactory reply. The turn of the Senate came first. Seven parties figured in the House as finally constituted. But an absolute majority was to be found in the two centres. They were of almost equal strength, the left centre totalling eighty-four members, the right eighty-one. There was little practical difference between the two groups. Both wished to see France consolidate herself under a stable and tranquil régime. But whereas the left centre thought that this end could be best guaranteed by the form of the Government, the right centre was concerned rather with its policy. A subtlety of nomenclature may bring out the distinction. The left centre was composed of conservative republicans; the right of republican conservatives. Together, the two centres would enable the Senate to perform its constitutional function of restraining the Chamber. The only danger that threatened was that the old constitutional quarrel between republicans and monarchists might be renewed. In that case the centres would part company and the Senate would split into two parties almost equally balanced. But this danger would be removed if the elections to the Chamber endorsed the Republic with sufficient emphasis. In the event

the republicans carried more than two-thirds of the constituencies—363 seats out of a total of 533. It seemed as though the constitutional battle was finally won and that the two Houses would reflect in their practice theories which they respectively embodied. Yet before the year was out it was discovered that the old issue had been raised again, and in a singularly acute form, and that, so far from working smoothly, the constitution threatened to break down altogether. The position was realized throughout France with a pain and disappointment which themselves explain why the crisis ripened so slowly. That it was finally settled without disorder was due to the good sense and patriotism of the chief figures in the conflict. On the democratic side the leadership remained in Gambetta's hands. But he had against him a rival who, though without the traditional prestige of the Comte de Chambord, was in all other respects more formidable in that he commanded both power and popularity. Gambetta's opponent was Marshal MacMahon, President of the Republic. Happily the dispute was not this time determined by a compromise. Gambetta's victory, destined to be the last of the decisive services which he rendered to his country, disposed of the question for more than a generation. When M. Millerand saw fit to reopen it at the time of his election to the Presidency, the circumstances had completely changed. The parliamentary Republic, working as Gambetta meant it to work, had carried out at home and abroad the whole programme which Gambetta bequeathed to it.

It took fourteen months of parliamentary wrangling to bring the issue to a head. Nevertheless the challenge had been issued by MacMahon before the election campaign opened and had been accepted by Gambetta before the second ballots for the Chamber brought the electoral period to a close. MacMahon's move, made on 13 January, 1876, a fortnight before the senatorial elections, took the form of a proclamation to the French people. "You wish," declared the Marshal, "for order and peace. It will be the duty of the senators and deputies whom you are about to elect to co-operate with the President of the Republic in maintaining both. In all sincerity we shall apply the constitutional laws, revision of which depends until 1880 on my sole initiative. . . . I appeal for a union of all who set social order, respect for law, and devotion to France above the traditions, aims, and pledges of party—I invite all such men to rally round my Government." There was a curious ring about this

language. What exactly did the President mean by co-operation? Why did he lay so much stress on his own right to maintain the letter of the constitution until 1880? And what was the party spirit which he bade patriotic Frenchmen ignore? It would have saved France much anxiety and would have spared an honest soldier much humiliation had the ambiguities of his proclamation been unveiled at once. But either they were not discovered or they were deliberately slurred over. The proclamation was enthusiastically received. It gave candidates a platform. The Republic was as yet an untried experiment. It had evolved neither parties nor programmes. The electors might well ask what they were invited to vote for or against. The Marshal's proclamation answered their enquiry. A vote for MacMahon was a vote for the constitution as drawn up by the Assembly. The President offered France the comforting prospect of four years' calm after so many upheavals and France was all eagerness to accept the offer. It is not surprising that the Marshal interpreted the election as a vote of confidence in himself. Whether a candidate labelled himself of the right or of the left he took his stand on the proclamation. Its generalities were such that it gave everybody just what he wanted. The Bonapartists accepted it gladly. A postponement of the constitutional issue until 1880 suited their tactics. The republicans were equally content. Four years loyal working, they held, would justify the constitution. Only in the great towns was there any real note of opposition. In Paris, for example, the chairman of the City Council stood for Parliament and declared in his election address that it was not enough to have established the Republic; the fruits of republicanism must be gathered in without delay. This contradiction to the conservative policy enunciated by the Marshal was the more ominous because it was uttered by M. Clemenceau. But M. Clemenceau's name did not yet carry weight outside municipal politics and official republicanism was more reserved. Gambetta himself was at the utmost pains to respect the Marshal's position. As the leader of the constructive republicans he was as resolute as the Marshal himself to maintain peace and order. The President had invited co-operation and he was prepared to co-operate. His terms became clear as the elections progressed towards their decisively republican result; but throughout the campaign he stood forth as a teacher interpreting public opinion to itself, not as a leader demanding support for a programme. The address

which he issued to the electors of Marseilles was little more than a sonorous echo of the presidential proclamation. Describing himself as an old servant of the republican ideal, Gambetta demanded "firmness in principle, combined with prudence and moderation in action"; and appealed to the electors to "support him by their votes if they were anxious not to sanction either reaction or revolution but to strengthen and develop republican institutions and to inaugurate an era of social peace and of material and moral prosperity." The conciliatory tone of this manifesto is the more noteworthy because it was issued in the middle of February when the Senate had been elected and when the issue of the elections to the Chamber, though still five days distant, was no longer in doubt. It fairly represents the position which Gambetta took up from the first and which he did not abandon until the President had destroyed the last prospect of an accommodation.

Since Gambetta is charged with opportunism and since he himself came to glory in the charge as nothing but an opprobrious name for his great principle of keeping Parliament in harmony with public opinion, attention must be called to the fact that his policy during the electoral period, though accepted in the end by his constituents, was at first adopted at some risk to his reputation. As deputy for the Seine Department in the National Assembly, Gambetta was a member of the electoral college which chose the five Paris senators. The republican members of this body drew up a programme, including secular education and the separation of Church from State, with which Gambetta was himself in sympathy. But when it was proposed to ask candidates whether they accepted this programme, he protested. An electoral college, he declared, had no business to behave like a deliberative assembly deciding issues by a majority vote. The opposition shown to his attitude only induced him to declare it more firmly. His first public speech in the electoral period was a solemn utterance. His position laid on him the duty of giving a lead to republican members of electoral colleges throughout France, but, like the good democrat that he was, he spoke with a certain awe of universal suffrage. He urged his friends to be mindful of the supreme issues at stake and not to be misled by the narrow, personal memories of the plebiscites. Their duty was to maintain the Republic and, as things now were, this duty was a piece of conservatism. He was a conservative himself. He wished to conserve the liberties won for

France by the Revolution. The appropriation of a label then in universal favour was Gambetta's answer to the action of the Cabinet. In their eagerness to make the elections yield a conservative result in a very different sense of the word, ministers were representing Gambetta as a red revolutionary and even forbade his meetings in departments where a state of siege was still maintained. Gambetta's soft answer failed to turn away their wrath. From this time onwards the leading articles in the "*République française*" began to receive the increasingly hostile attention of the police.

The senatorial elections over, Gambetta took a further step which gave yet another handle to his enemies and enabled them to raise the old cry of dictator. By way of showing that for all his moderation and conservatism he was still the leader of democracy in France, he stood as a candidate in four great centres, Paris, Marseilles, Bordeaux, and Lille. Elected in all four, he opted for Paris, but it was at Lille that he addressed his first public meeting. His tone was now more masterful. In a speech of thankfulness and triumph he commented on the elections to the Senate. The Republic was now safe he declared, for the 36,000 communes of France had proclaimed themselves the custodians of its traditions. Passing to the offensive, he contrasted the new Senate with the old Assembly, elected, as one of its own spokesmen had said, in an evil hour. The Assembly had been forced to yield to hopes and tendencies with which it was out of sympathy and the time had come for universal suffrage to acclaim its act of surrender. The people must elect a Chamber whose majority would be republican, democratic, liberal and pacific. To all of these epithets, including even the last—for peace, he argued, could only be assured by a breach with dynasties whose traditions or policy pointed to war—Gambetta attached meanings which shocked and were intended to shock the official conservatives. As republicans the majority would make a final breach with the country's monarchical past. As democrats they would find in the aptitude of the masses for political affairs an unworked mine which they would open up, thus not merely recognizing equality but creating it. As liberals they would be respectful towards liberty of conscience and would tolerate every form of religious belief; but they would not endure that the clergy of any sect should form themselves into a party, still less into a faction. Accordingly it would be the duty of the new Chamber

to remodel the clerical Education Act passed by the Assembly. At this stage the representatives of the police intervened and Gambetta was informed that he must not attack a law of the land. Retorting amid the cheers of the meeting, that he would not waste breath on a law soon to be abrogated, Gambetta closed his speech with the declaration that the country of Voltaire would not become the last refuge of clericalism. In itself this was no new doctrine. Gambetta's educational policy was known and its anti-clerical basis notorious. But coming as it did in reply to the intervention of a government functionary Gambetta's language took on a special significance. Hitherto the influences which he had been attacking had generally been described as royalist or imperialist. Henceforward clerical became the comprehensive label for his opponents. The term was quite fairly used. Too weak to change the constitution of the State, the enemies of the Republic found their rallying-point in the defence of the Church. Gambetta attacked them, not unwillingly, in their new position, and by his attack enunciated the first point in the future republican programme. The Lille speech thus marks his transition from the constitution of the Republic to its policy when constituted.

A second point in his programme was developed at Avignon three days later. It had been reported to Gambetta that official pressure was being brought to bear on the electors to secure votes for a "conservative" candidate whose imperialist sympathies were beyond doubt, and that the local republicans felt themselves intimidated. Gambetta was not the man to tolerate any attack on the freedom of universal suffrage. He determined to make Avignon a test case and to stand for the seat himself. In presenting his candidature he declared his resolve to put an end to the scandal that republican institutions should be undermined by functionaries whose duty it was to support them. Departmental prefects in particular must be sincere and loyal servants of the established régime. This condition, he went on to point out, could be secured almost automatically, for the Minister of the Interior by whom all appointments were made was himself responsible to the Chamber. The Chamber was therefore able to exercise control over the administrative staff. It would test their fitness by their zeal in securing the liberties of tongue and pen without which universal suffrage became a farce; and in practice these two liberties were expressed by the unrestricted right of public

meeting and by freedom of journalistic comment. The reactionaries of the constituency ignored the warning. A gang of rowdies broke up one of Gambetta's meetings and official pressure secured his defeat at the polls. Such a victory over such a man was more dangerous than any defeat. The Chamber took up the case, the facts were revealed in a public inquiry, and the election was declared invalid. The effects of the episode were soon felt in every prefecture in France.

His rough treatment at Avignon secured Gambetta a magnificent welcome at Bordeaux. Huge crowds demonstrated in the streets and blocked the approach to the meeting which Gambetta intended to address. It was found impossible to make a way for the speaker and the meeting had to be abandoned. His postponed speech was delivered to a large private gathering on the following day (13 February). With the polls a week ahead, Gambetta declared that an overwhelming republican majority was already assured. He had no need to wait for the results. The meaning of the election was already clear. It was that there was now no room in France for anything except democracy. To represent its triumph as the beginning of a red terror was a piece of folly. As Thiers had said in that very city five years before, the future belonged to the wisest. Democracy, having secured its lien on the future, would show its wisdom. It was ready to govern and could not be excluded from government. As a governing force it would realize the revolutionary ideals cherished by Mirabeau and even by St Just and Robespierre, though their spirits were cramped by the passionate, combative circumstances of their time. The democratic programme would avoid their errors. It would be as national as the vote which had called for it. It must be the programme of a united party not of a coalition of groups. Such a programme would show its wisdom by accepting limitations. "I do not say—I am far from saying," continued Gambetta in words which were evidently addressed to the Elysée, "that your representatives will carry out the whole programme in their four years' term. I do not believe that they can. To be frank I do not desire that they should. But they can establish their ideas in the administration of France."

From Bordeaux Gambetta went to Paris, where he addressed two meetings. The occasion was critical. It was said of him at this time that while he was himself inclined to move towards moderation he could not drag his tail after him. His Paris

meetings were intended to show that he was master of his tail. He spoke in the working-class quarter of Belleville, which he described, in one of the classical allusions he delighted to introduce into his addresses to his "tail," as the Aventine Hill of the Republic. His task was not made easy for him. A manifesto was read out by his chairman. It declared that the Republic would ensure the progress of France by bringing the temper of modern science to bear on the solution of political problems. Adroitly giving a controversial turn to Gambetta's own assertion that constructive work must needs be slow, it went on to announce that, unlike the God of Genesis, the Republic would not make a world in six days and find it very good. It ended with a demand for a democratic constitutional revision in 1880.

Gambetta eulogized the manifesto. It contained, he said, the seeds of the future. It proved that France, which had been sick, was now whole again, and that the armies of her freedom were no longer pent within a narrow and dangerous pass but had begun to deploy upon the open plain. The results of their forward movement would now be made apparent. He demanded the realities of victory, something more substantial than official decrees published one day and revoked the next. In a passage which swept the audience off its feet, he called for schools, real schools, equipped with good modern text-books and staffed by masters of flesh and blood. But neither educational reform nor any other reform was possible except through the efforts of a devoted administration. At present the administration did not know what régime it was called upon to administer. Its position was ambiguous and the heart of the ambiguity lay in the septennial presidency. The Assembly had set up this office to serve as a vestibule either to a Republic or to a Monarchy. Its purpose must no longer remain undefined.

The last of this historic series of speeches, which were to dominate French politics for the next forty years, was delivered at Lyons late in February after the first ballots had put Gambetta at the head of a majority in the new Chamber. As M. Hanotaux points out, it was the speech of a victorious party leader ready to take office. First and foremost, said Gambetta, the polls had made it clear that France endorsed the revolution. Secondly, the election was a protest against clericalism whether at home or abroad. It was as a liberal and liberalizing Power that France proposed to reassume her place in Europe. In

these statements was involved a whole domestic and foreign programme ; and since this programme had now become matter of practical politics it was necessary for its author to declare his attitude towards the head of the State elected under very different circumstances. Gambetta weighed his words. He was careful to repudiate the intrigue which had replaced Thiers by MacMahon. But since the head of the State stood above and beyond party, he was entitled to every respect. On his part, however, he must show proper regard for the temper of the State of which he was the head. It was not a headlong temper. While the party which was now dominant in it held that there were some things that required to be done at once, it was willing to postpone other items in its programme until to-morrow and even until the day after to-morrow. In a word it was a constitutional party and was claiming no more than the due of the position in which, after many struggles, it found itself constitutionally placed.

No clearer hint could have been given to the Marshal that if he accepted the results of the election and called upon Gambetta to form a Government, his own views and rights would receive every consideration at the new Cabinet's hands. But MacMahon had his own constitutional theories, honestly formed and conscientiously upheld. In his view the essential feature of the constitution he had sworn to maintain was his own office. The first action taken by the National Assembly was to create an executive. The Marshal was of the old school. For fourteen centuries the unity of France was expressed by her central executive. So, to his mind, it was still. His own power was the central pillar round which the rest of the constitution was built. True, the Chamber was elected by universal suffrage, the sovereign principle of France, out of which the sovereign Assembly itself had issued. But if the constitution had intended the last word to rest with the popular House, to what end had it created the Senate ? That body served no purpose except to control the doings of the Chamber, and when would its doings stand in need of control if not when they ran counter to the policy of the executive power ? From this point of view Gambetta's claim that French policy should be shaped by a ministry resting on the support of the majority of the Chamber was flagrantly unconstitutional. It involved a transfer of sovereignty and proposed to effect it by a *coup d'état* without the formality of revising the constitution. The mere existence

of a homogeneous ministry was unconstitutional to the Marshal's mind. In all Assemblies he had known the majority had been formed by a coalition of groups representing in their alliance and quarrels the actual relations of the various sections of French opinion. Gambetta, however, had appealed for a union of republicans into one great party which should absorb group differences. It was a revolutionary proposal, a mark of that same dictatorial temper which had induced Gambetta to contest five constituencies. The President felt it his duty, as a loyal soldier called to stand sentinel over the infant Republic, never to make terms with such radicalism as this.

Personal factors also came into play. The Marshal disliked Gambetta, whose slovenly appearance doubtless shocked his military mind. The two men met but once, when a pre-arranged accident brought them together in the Bois. Neither seems to have wished to renew the conversation. Moreover the Marshal had no head for politics, and no liking for politicians. He lived at the Elysée, away from Versailles and its intrigues, was a member of the most exclusive circle of Paris society, and when in need of counsel, turned to his relative, the Duc de Broglie. Considerations such as these helped to widen the breach between the President and the republican left, but were not themselves responsible for it. The Marshal had a case. The constitution was certainly ambiguous in the vital matter of the last word. He had set his views before the country in the proclamation which had been generally approved; were he now to prove false to them, were he to make the executive the obedient echo of the legislature, or rather of the majority in the Chamber, he would be a traitor to his oath. From this position the Marshal never wavered.

On the other hand, it was his business to govern in co-operation with Parliament. He must find a majority, and for this purpose must choose a Cabinet congenial to both Houses and frame a policy compatible with their views. The results of the election proved the country republican. It was, therefore, his duty to see that the administration upheld republican opinions. He appreciated and was prepared to gratify Gambetta's demand for loyal prefects; and the whole departmental administration was thoroughly changed during the next twelve months. Military commands were, however, another matter. A soldier's political opinions were his private concern and had nothing to do with his fitness for his post, of which the Marshal was himself

the proper judge. As for the Cabinet, the choice of members would depend partly—as in the case of the Ministers of War and Marine—on their technical efficiency, partly—as in the case of the Ministers of the Interior and Public Instruction—on their loyalty to the President's own policy. His choice would show regard for the feelings of Parliament, but in this matter, too, the last word must rest with himself, because as Chief of the Executive Power he was finally responsible to France for all that ministers might do. In the matter of a Prime Minister he would go further. The man whose business was to get legislation through Parliament must be sympathetic to the majority. Gambetta was, of course, impossible, since Gambetta was the avowed enemy of the constitution as MacMahon understood it. But there was one other member of the left whose influence rivalled Gambetta's—Thiers. MacMahon considered Thiers and dismissed him with the shrewd remark that Thiers might replace him, and could therefore not serve under him. The President fell back on Dufaure, one of Thiers's ex-ministers and an old-fashioned liberal.

The President's constitutional theories could not be applied successfully unless the Senate were willing, in the last resort, to grant him a dissolution against the Chamber, and unless the Chamber remained an agglomerate of groups and failed to develop a homogeneous majority capable of demanding its own ministry. Both conditions of success were known to be present. In the Senate the balance of parties was so even that it was doubtful where the majority lay. Issue was joined on the first vacancies among the irremovable senators. By the narrowest of majorities the right succeeded in co-opting reactionaries. These votes were decisive. Just because its margin was so narrow the right could not afford to yield an inch to the republican lower House, and when the crisis came, it was not merely ready but eager to support the President. In the Chamber, too, the first move was in MacMahon's favour. Gambetta's plan of uniting the left broke down. Having contrived, not without difficulty, to hold a meeting of all the republican deputies, Gambetta pleaded that nothing but a solid majority could enforce a reluctant Government to purify the departmental administration of its disloyal elements. Opposition came from Jules Ferry, the leader of the moderate left. Opinion in France, he felt, was still divided; in particular the conflict over clericalism was raging in every village in the land. The time was

not ripe to force an issue ; fluctuating combinations of groups would best secure to France the period of tranquillity which she needed.¹ The extreme left also desired their freedom of action, and, in the end, scarcely seventy deputies supported Gambetta in his resolve to form no group of his own. It was only in moments of crisis that the various elements of the left coalesced to form one solid party under Gambetta's leadership—an unsatisfactory position, deplored by Gambetta in a public speech on current affairs.

Gambetta dealt with this complex situation by means of a triple policy calculated to maintain his principles, further his programme, and answer attacks. The principle that sovereignty rested with the Chamber claimed first attention and proved exceedingly hard to enforce. A group of Bonapartists, aware that the President's dislike of Gambetta would secure them a certain immunity, sought to discredit the new Parliament by insulting its leading member. There were disgraceful scenes. When Gambetta spoke, the foulest charges were hurled at him. He was a tyrant. He was the friend of communists and ally of incendiaries. He had bolted to San Sebastian in order to avoid examination about his accounts. When all else failed, the members of the gang fell back on a taunt which, in every country commends itself to the Johnsonian school of patriots ; they yelled at Gambetta that he was an Italian. It is possible that this scandalous behaviour helped to decide Gambetta to shift his assertion of parliamentary sovereignty from the whole House to its committees. The move was certainly effective. When the Budget for 1876 was introduced it was referred to a Commission in the ordinary way. Gambetta had himself elected president of this body and, aided by the financial knowledge of his friend, Edmond Adam, discharged his duties with great practical zeal. M. Reinach has published a long memorandum, undated but probably compiled in 1868 when Gambetta was writing articles on the Empire's budget, in which he set out the principles of his financial policy. It is the work of a man who did not often put his ideas on paper, and was, therefore, the more anxious to omit nothing. It starts with a definition of public finance, goes on to draw out the great truth that politics and finance go together, and reaches the conclusion that republican policy demands a graduated income tax of not too inquisitorial a character. The later sections of the memor-

¹ This view is strongly presented in M. de Marcère's history of this period.

andum examine the views of authorities and illustrate the whole argument from the budgets of the First Empire. The memorandum gives the clue to Gambetta's action of President of the Commission. He was careful to separate general questions of financial policy from the critical examination of estimates. The former topic he was content to leave with a general declaration in favour of income tax ; but estimates were examined item by item and important economies were effected. The whole proceeding made a profound impression on France, which learned from Gambetta the lesson he had himself learnt from his English studies that parliamentary sovereignty is based on control of the public purse.

Gambetta's programme was anti-clerical. He was himself anxious to raise this issue and once created a violent scene in the matter of Jesuit influence in the schools. But the Chamber was not yet ready to fight the matter out. Its temper was revealed in the debate on the election of a leading Catholic layman, Comte Albert de Mun. The purely religious issue was not raised, since M. de Mun's opponent was a priest. The controversy turned on clerical influence on politics. Gambetta cited letters in M. de Mun's favour from his Bishop and from the Archbishop of Paris, and the bestowal during the election of a Papal honour on the favoured candidate. It was a strong case, but the Chamber was moved by the Comte de Mun's question whether the Republic had no room for an upholder of the old beliefs. Finally Gambetta himself acquiesced in a parliamentary inquiry. Its upshot was that the Comte de Mun was unseated, but his constituents re-elected him and the Chamber took no further action. Gambetta was too competent a politician to force an issue on which his party was not solid. But events justified his instinct. It was the clerical question which produced the final crisis.

The conventional answer to Gambetta's attacks on the Church was that their author was a revolutionary. In defending himself Gambetta was embarrassed by his own left wing. It was proposed for example that the term of military service should be reduced from five years to three. The proposal had some popular support behind it and it was mainly due to Gambetta's authority that it was promptly thrown out. His action did not prevent a reactionary minister from declaring, on the eve of the dissolution, that Gambetta's policy was to replace a national army by a national guard. But the real vantage ground of the

conservatives lay in their maintenance of the moral order. As interpreted by them, moral order contradicted two cherished republican principles—freedom of the local authorities and freedom of the press. It was MacMahon's view that freedom meant license and this was the ground on which he finally chose to fight. The importance of the question lay in the recollections of the Commune which its discussion provoked. The supporters of the moral order had every nervous mind in France behind them when they declared that the least concession would enable the Commune to raise its head again. The republican defence was made more difficult by the fact that the extreme left was pressing for a complete amnesty towards all implicated in the Commune. Opinion was not yet ripe for it, and the Government declined to move beyond the generous exercise of the prerogative of mercy. With his Paris constituents to satisfy—the tone of his autumn speech to them had been apologetic—Gambetta supported a measure which, while refusing a complete amnesty, forbade further prosecutions. The Bill passed the Chamber in spite of the Government's opposition. When it went to the Senate the Government announced that, in view of the Chamber's vote, they would agree to accept it. The Senate, however, threw it out and Dufaure, having failed in his main duty of keeping harmony between the two Houses, tendered his resignation.

Dufaure resigned at the end of 1876. The eastern question had begun to blaze up again and the Marshal was anxious to avoid a domestic crisis. But it was not an easy situation to regulate. If the new Premier were not a good republican, the exasperated Chamber would vote no confidence. If, on the other hand, he were sympathetic to the left, the Senate, having tasted blood, would thirst for more. Gambetta, who shared the Marshal's desire to find a way out and who thought that the presidential objections to himself were largely personal, took the initiative and submitted to the President a list of ministers with whom his party would co-operate. His intervention had an effect other than he had intended. The Marshal called the retiring Cabinet together and explained his position. The one thing he could not do was to take a ministry which would look to Gambetta and his majority for its orders. Such an arrangement would destroy the balance of the constitution. His words conveyed the impression that he would work with the left if he could be saved from the least appearance of con-

cession to Gambetta's radicalism. In these circumstances the name of Jules Simon was put forward. Of the whole heartedness of M. Simon's republicanism there could be no doubt. There was even less doubt of his hostility towards Gambetta. Neither man had forgotten those terrible days at Bordeaux in February 1872.

MacMahon accepted M. Simon, and M. Simon accepted office. His plan was to gain the goodwill of the Senate by a stroke of which Gambetta should be the victim. On the advice of the Budget Commission the Cabinet had struck out certain credits ; with M. Simon's connivance the Senate reinserted them. The Senate's right to amend money Bills was not mentioned in the constitution, which simply stated that such Bills must originate in the Chamber. In a speech packed full of constitutional learning, Gambetta urged the Chamber to make the matter a question of privilege. His main argument, that since the Senate had the right of dissolving the Chamber, the power of amending money bills really gave it control of the purse, deserved close attention ; but a new ministry has its privileges, and the Chamber liked and trusted its head. M. Simon had his way and carried on for four difficult months. Then the clerical question brought him down.

These were the days before Leo XIII had popularized liberal Catholicism and had begun to reconcile the Church with the modern spirit. Pius IX still ruled—an old, suspicious, and somewhat irritable prisoner of the Vatican. It now seemed to him that the Italian Government was withdrawing some of the poor satisfactions accorded him by the law of guarantees. His Secretary of State made his complaints matter of diplomatic protest to the Powers. Catholic France, then full of anxiety for the Holy Father and for the Church, took the alarm. Petitions poured in on the Government urging it to act. There was a debate. M. Simon danced his egg dance. He was profoundly respectful of religious beliefs, but the Concordat was the law of the land and Bishops must observe it. The Prime Minister particularly deprecated the pressure brought to bear on the Marshal. He took the opportunity of saying that, despite political disagreements, five months' co-operation with him had increased his respect for the head of the State. It was an adroit performance, but Gambetta ruined it. There was no question, he said, of religious belief or of the Marshal's loyalty to the State. The only question was whether the Vatican was

to interfere in the politics of France. At the end of a passionate speech he proclaimed from the tribune that clericalism was the enemy. The House was carried away and M. Simon felt obliged to acquiesce in a resolution condemning ultramontism. Its terms shocked the Marshal, who felt it specially hard that M. Simon had accepted them after paying compliments to himself. He resolved to be rid of a Minister who so misinterpreted him, and waited his chance. It came within a fortnight in a debate on the press law. M. Simon had an unpleasant afternoon. His enemies baited him with quotations from his old speeches in favour of journalistic liberty. M. Simon beat a skilful retreat, requesting the House not to deprive the Government of its power of punishing offensive references to the heads of sovereign states. Gambetta, realizing the real difficulty of the position, moved that the Bill be recommitted. But the House was out of hand and refused.

Next day, 26 May, M. Simon received a letter from the President, who stated that he was responsible to France for internal order and must therefore demand an explanation of the Prime Minister's surrender to the House. M. Simon replied that his responsibility lay towards Parliament and very properly resigned. The Marshal's letter had obviously made it impossible for him to continue in office and had, in all but the actual words, amounted to the dismissal of a ministry which had not forfeited the confidence of Parliament. At first, however, Gambetta refused to raise this important constitutional issue. His aim was not to force the President to fight but rather to free him from the influence of a camarilla. He therefore induced the now reunited left to content itself with a demand for a Ministry possessing the confidence of the majority. A way of escape was thus left open, but the Marshal promptly closed it. The Premier of his choice was the Duc de Broglie.

Next day the Houses were made acquainted with the Marshal's reasons in a presidential message which betrayed the new Premier's caustic pen. The republican party, explained the President, was demanding fundamental changes to which he could not consent. Whether their execution, he continued in words which pointedly indicated Gambetta, was intended for to-day or to-morrow, he judged them inopportune. He would therefore exercise his powers up to their legal limit in opposing a policy which he considered ruinous for France. The message ended by adjourning Parliament for a month. As

usual the Duc de Broglie was playing for time. In a month he restaffed the departments with anti-republican prefects charged to influence public opinion in the coming election. Thiers felt that it was 1830 over again and M. Reinach records him as saying that Gambetta was too moderate under provocation. Gambetta, however, was ready to accept the Marshal's challenge. Since MacMahon was relying on his own prestige throughout France, he must be taught that he was not indispensable. In reply to a deputation of students Gambetta took occasion to observe that France had at her disposal a statesman whose constitutional principles were beyond reproach and who might discharge again the presidential functions with which he was already familiar. It was a declaration of alliance with Thiers and of war on the President. This uncompromising acceptance of a challenge as uncompromisingly delivered was forced on Gambetta by considerations of a merely tactical order. But a profounder thought sustained his policy. By stripping the constitution of its ambiguities, the crisis would ultimately strengthen the Republic. Gambetta expressed this view in a characteristic letter to M. Marcellin Pellet, the youngest deputy of the 363. "For my part," he wrote, "the more our adversaries show the white feather, the more I feel inclined to worry them. We must take advantage of their blunders, push on towards the dissolution, and force one and all to bow before the nation's final verdict. That is the only way to turn over a new leaf, make a clean sweep of everything, and put a fresh shirt on France, which, ever since 4 September, has been forced to go on wearing its old linen all spotted and stained with the blood and dirt of former Governments." (30 May, 1877.)

The adjournment over, the Marshal demanded a dissolution on the ground that a Government dependent on the radical party would no longer be master of its own actions. In the Chamber the new Minister of the Interior defended the President and attacked Gambetta, dwelling with some effect on the confusion into which his income tax proposals would throw French finance. But the speech took an unhappy development. The minister was moved to contrast the destructive work of the Chamber with the achievements of the Assembly which had pacified France and liberated her territory. A deputy—it was not Gambetta, though a movement of Gambetta's hand may have inspired his action—jumped up, pointed to Thiers, and shouted, "There sits the liberator of our territory." The whole

left rose at the words and, Gambetta leading them, greeted Thiers with round after round of cheers. The moving scene has impressed itself on history. The great little man who was the centre of it all sat quietly in his place, his hands clasped in front of him, the tears trickling quietly down his cheeks. His recognition had come at last.

Then Gambetta went to the tribune to make his defence. It was his enemies' chance. Desks were banged, wild shouts raised. The scene, as Gambetta said, was a saturnalia. Through it all he quietly delivered to the stenographers the speech which all France was to read next day. This was no party quarrel between whig and tory. It touched the safety of the Republic. The men who were claiming to save the constitution were in fact outraging it. Their aim was to preserve monarchical prerogatives for the Marshal in the hope of what might happen in 1880. Politically these saviours of the constitution were a coalition of incompatible elements whose triumph would let loose civil war on France. Only their clericalism held them together. But the appeal lay to France and no official pressure could stifle her voice. The polls would show what the country thought of a Government of priests. "We go 363 ; we shall return 400."

In the Chamber what is perhaps the most sweeping vote of censure ever passed on any Ministry was carried by 363 to 158 ; in the Senate a dissolution was granted by 149 to 130.

On 25 June the Chamber was dissolved.

XX

THE PARLIAMENTARY REPUBLIC

THE Hoche anniversary dinner, which Gambetta was in the habit of attending, fell on the eve of the dissolution and gave him the chance of presenting the issue as he saw it. France had no longer to choose between Republic and Monarchy. The Republic was an established fact. But was it to be a reality or a sham? In the phrase of the day, was it to be a Republic with or without republicans? Gambetta had no doubt of the answer which would be given to this question were it fairly put. The French mind revolted from shams. "France will not allow herself to be deceived nor the clearness of her vision to be perverted. By miserable devices, by attacks on writers and on the distributors of their writings, by prosecuting the press, by closing political clubs, by exacting legal punishment for rash and careless words—though the utterance of such words is always to be deprecated—our adversaries hope to restrain our people from jest and laughter over what they find comic and grotesque. No, gentlemen. You may harass Frenchmen, but you will never stifle France." The one danger was that the main current of French opinion should be broken up into a multitude of rivulets. It was therefore necessary for republicans to face the polls as an absolutely united party. Gambetta used all his authority to prevent any split in the republican vote. Thanks to his efforts not one of the 363 was opposed by a republican of a different colour, and in only six of the constituencies held by supporters of the Government was the opposition unable to unite in the choice of a candidate.

Gambetta himself set the example of concord. The chief of such a party as he hoped to create could only be Thiers, and early in July he declared that he could not allow himself to be put forward as a possible rival to the liberator of France. Once more he proclaimed himself the disinterested servant of democracy, free from personal ambition. His frank loyalty

overcame Thiers's long distrust. The two men worked together at their plans. Their victory, already assured, was to be exploited to the utmost. The new majority would force the Marshal's resignation. Thiers would step into his place and would commission Gambetta to form a Government. The distribution of portfolios was discussed. Gambetta himself was to take the Foreign Office. "I will introduce you to Europe," said Thiers. To some extent this aggressive line was taken by Thiers's own choice; to some extent it was forced upon the republicans by the behaviour of the Government. To Gambetta's fury, ministers sought to transform the election into a plebiscite. Whom would France choose, the revolutionary demagogue or the loyal old warrior? The Government made no scruple about fighting their battle in the Marshal's name. Their candidates were his candidates, and were permitted to print their election posters on the official white paper of the French Republic. The President lent himself to these tactics and allowed his official tours to become conservative demonstrations. The whole machinery of patronage was set to work. Five thousand public functionaries were displaced and their successors were officially informed that good political service would not pass unrewarded. The republican press was roughly handled, more than a million francs being collected in fines. "Loyal" journals on the other hand were carefully spoon-fed from a central press bureau in Paris. The republicans faced the storm with confidence. A central defence committee offered legal advice and almost every constituency was soon absorbed in the quarrel between the local editor and the local prefect. The main issues ran the risk of being snowed under by the mass of personal disputes. There was some doubt, too, as to how long this campaign of pressure, intimidation, and corruption would be continued. The constitution provided for elections within three months of a dissolution. But by an argument of doubtful legality ministers had already adjourned the polls from 25 September to 14 October, and there were rumours of further postponements. Gambetta, who had hitherto been at pains not to play into the hands of his enemies, now resolved to come to the front and deliver a speech which would give a lead to his party. A visit to Lille was quietly arranged, and Gambetta addressed a small audience behind closed doors and windows but not in the absence of reporters. It is the last of his longer speeches to reveal his full mastery of concentrated phrase. He

opened with a review of the press campaign which recalled the worst excesses of the Empire. From the campaign he passed to the men behind it. Might not their temper be such that they would disregard a republican majority, even to the extent of forcing another dissolution? Gambetta declined to believe it. The plebiscitary character which the Government sought to give to the election proved that Bonapartism was making its last effort. It would be crushed by an alliance of bourgeoisie and proletariat, whose union would return 400 republican deputies amid the expressed approval of all Europe. Therefore the opposition had no need, and the defeated ministerialists would never dare, to pass the bounds of legality. Gambetta summed up his case in the most famous of all his perorations. "When the authority to which all must bow shall have spoken, no one will make bold to defy it. Believe me, when these millions of peasants, workmen, and employers, the electors of the free land of France, have made their choice between the alternatives submitted—believe me, when these millions have declared themselves, have signified their decision and proclaimed their will, no one will say them nay, whatever his rank in the political or administrative hierarchy. Take it from me, gentlemen, when France has once lifted up her sovereign voice, there will be no course possible save to give way or to give up."¹

This concluding epigram became the catch phrase of the campaign. It was universally applied to the Marshal, but with consummate art Gambetta had not mentioned the Marshal's name. He had set him in his place by including him in the army of public functionaries whose whole duty was to serve the State. There was talk of arresting Gambetta after this speech. Had that mistake been committed, the effect of his warning to the Marshal would have been intensified. As it was, the Government foolishly prosecuted the "*République française*" for giving publicity to attacks on the Chief of the State. On the eve of the elections Gambetta was fined 4000 francs and sentenced to three months' imprisonment which he never served. A like penalty was inflicted on him for the repetition of the obnoxious words in his Paris election address. It was a pointless demonstration of ill-will, for the case was dragged out by appeals until the meeting of the Chamber gave Gambetta the protection of parliamentary immunity.

¹ "Se soumettre ou se démettre."

For three weeks after the Lille speech the republican party gained ground, but on 3 September it suffered an irretrievable set back. Thiers was seized with a heart attack which swiftly proved fatal. He had been at work to within a few hours of the end, negotiating with Gambetta, and composing the political manifesto which was published, incomplete as he had left it, after his death. Gambetta was at first discomfited by the news, but plucked up heart at sight of the wonderful demonstration into which Paris converted his funeral. The Commune, that last obstacle to complete republican unity, seemed forgiven and forgotten. Nevertheless, Thiers's removal had decisive effect on the fortunes of the republican party, and on the career of its leader. There was no one who could hold the moderates like Thiers and a certain number of voters began to rally to the Government, not from any approval of its policy, but from fear of Gambetta's radicalism. Their defection explains the failure of Gambetta's prophecy that the 363 would return 400. As for Gambetta himself, he was at once made to feel the suspicion in which his colleagues held him. He watched Thiers's funeral as a spectator, and lesser men spoke the last words over the tomb. In truth the republicans were afraid of their leader. For all the sincerity of his declarations that he sought but to interpret opinion, in his own favourite phrase to serve democracy, he was a masterful, determined man—the most Napoleonic character France had known since Napoleon. What would he do, what would he not do, if he were placed in power with no one left to control him? He had, indeed, become too big for the Republic which he had made, and though it was long before he abandoned his hope of forming a great progressive ministry, he began from this time to contemplate a position for himself beyond and above party, whence he should guide but not initiate events.

For the moment, however, he saw in the situation nothing but a fresh chance of proving his own disinterestedness. He had never aimed at the Presidency. It was the one great constitutional position not controlled by universal suffrage, and, therefore, gave no scope for his qualities. Opinion, however, was inclining to brush aside this subtlety and to confer the titular headship of the Republic on the most typical and authoritative republican of the time. Gambetta himself forbade a development which so shrewd an observer as Taine forecasted as inevitable. He was the first to propose that Grévy should be made candidate for the Paris seat held by Thiers, and at the

great public meeting which he addressed in Paris in October he declared that Grévy succeeded to all Thiers's claims. He eulogized his new leader as moderate, upright, and loyal. The epithets were well chosen, except perhaps the last. Grévy was the most respected veteran of his party. His wisdom had been proved in 1848, and he had shown himself an effective President, both of the National Assembly and of the Chamber. Yet the Duc de Broglie was right when he said that his name was unknown in the average French village. He was, however, wrong in adding that Grévy was merely Gambetta's mask. Muzzle would have been a truer description, for Grévy's dislike of Gambetta was acute and governed his political action in the position of strength to which he now succeeded. "Grévy will take anything from me except myself," said Gambetta to Madame Adam a year or so later, when ministerial appointments were under discussion.

The death of Thiers had one further effect on Gambetta's immediate attitude. It was no longer safe for him to fight on the domestic issue of autocratic versus parliamentary republicanism. In his Paris speech, which was delivered under great physical difficulties, he developed the argument that a clerical victory would involve France in war. The election was the plebiscite of 1870 over again. Let France contrast the peace and prosperity which the Empire had then promised with the disasters which it had brought. After the election the Duc de Broglie denounced Gambetta for unpatriotic conduct in evoking the spectre of a fresh invasion. It is sufficient answer to his attack that MacMahon himself agreed to remain in office only from fear of the external trouble that might follow on his resignation. The situation was, in fact, critical and obscure. These were the years that saw the formation of the Europe which lasted until 1914, and with this Europe the Church had hitherto refused to come to terms. The pontificate of Pius IX was wearing itself out in defiance of the spirit of the age; the eastern question had lately taken a most dangerous turn; Italy and Germany were both apprehensive of the effect of the next conclave on their unity. Who could predict their attitude if, as a result of the elections, France, whose position in the new Europe was still undefined, proclaimed herself the champion of clerical reaction and sought an alliance with Austria, victim, like herself, of the new nationalism? Gambetta, whose public references to foreign affairs were always marked by patriotic

reticence, cannot be blamed because, at a moment of admitted stress in Europe, he warned his countrymen that the policy of every Great Power would be affected by their votes.

Over 300 Republicans were returned at the first ballot.¹ The majority, though reduced, was more than adequate and the first thought of the defeated Government was to flee from the wrath to come. The Marshal was anxious to resign; the Minister of the Interior threw up the sponge; but the Duc de Broglie kept his head. It was still possible to gain time. With Thiers dead and Gambetta suspect, the republican party might disintegrate. In any case, its leaders were not ready with an alternative Government. France, too, wished to temporize. It was her hope that the Paris Exhibition of the following year should afford triumphant evidence of her recovery, political as well as material. A vigorous republican Government would defeat this hope. By raising the clerical issue both in education and in international affairs, it would drag the country into the throes of a struggle for which opinion was not yet ripe. With the support of the Senate, the Duc de Broglie was prepared to carry on.

A speech which Gambetta delivered late in October, while the second ballots were still pending, confirmed the Duc de Broglie in his opinion. France, declared Gambetta, had spoken. It might be a few weeks before ministers bowed to her judgment, but the victors could afford to wait. Their conduct in victory would be moderate. A full inquiry must be held into all acts of official intimidation. There was nothing vindictive about the proposal; it was a measure of political necessity. The rural voter would never realize the full significance of his vote so long as a functionary stood at his elbow to give him instructions how to cast it. To be made responsible, the rural voter must first be made free. For the rest Gambetta repeated his denial that his policy involved an attack on religion. It was directed solely against clerical interference in politics. Not a hint of the Marshal's resignation. It was the speech of a man who wished to make it easy for the President to give way.

Considerably encouraged, the Duc de Broglie faced Parliament. But he presumed too far on the tolerance of the majority. The republicans at once demanded a parliamentary investiga-

¹ The final Republican strength was 326, but was brought up to 400 by the invalidation of MacMahonist deputies, returned thanks to the improper exercise of official pressure.

tion of the events of 16 May and their consequences. The Duc de Broglie denounced procedure which would place judgment in the hands of one of the parties to the dispute. His invective against this latest manifestation of radical malice brought up Gambetta. In one of his best fighting speeches the republican leader denounced the foul attacks¹ on himself by which the Government had hoped to carry the country. In the patriotic eastern departments he had been officially represented as a Prussian spy, in the reactionary west as a red chauvinist. The men who planned such attacks had no notion of the meaning of republicanism. It was not his way, Gambetta went on, to introduce class distinctions into politics, but the Duc de Broglie with his proud manner and polished phrases was an aristocrat of the old school with no sense for the quality of the modern democratic world. It was because he was out of touch with his time that he had seized power and had sought to keep a minority in office by recourse to the vilest devices of the later Empire. He must understand that universal suffrage was sovereign in France and that even Parliament, whose authority the Government was prepared to respect, was merely its instrument.

The Duc de Broglie thought that this reference to the sovereignty of universal suffrage would secure him the support of the Senate, and therefore invited it to forbid the inquiry which the Chamber had voted. But the Duc d'Audriffet-Pasquier, as President of the Senate, ruled that the Chamber was master in its own House. Deprived of the expected backing, the Government resigned.

There followed four difficult and alarming weeks. MacMahon put a soldier at the head of a transitional ministry. The Chamber declined to enter into relations with it, and refused to sanction the collection of the direct taxes. The influence of Gambetta is plainly visible in the firmness with which the

¹ These attacks almost took a turn disastrous to Gambetta's authority. In the gloomy weeks which followed his resignation from the Government of National Defence, he had lived at Bordeaux with a lady notorious for her love affairs. This lady had afterwards accompanied him to San Sebastian where he had given her his photograph with the inscription, "To my little queen whom I love more than France." She had also become possessed of some dangerous political correspondence. On the eve of the 1877 elections, the lady, with whom Gambetta had since broken, threatened to sell her documents to Rouher, the Bonapartist leader. Fortunately, however, Madame Adam was able to recover them, and for a fifth of the sum that Rouher would have paid. She tells the story, dramatically enough, in the concluding volume of her "Souvenirs."

House kept its grip on the purse-strings throughout the crisis. Ugly rumours became current. The Marshal intended another dissolution. He proposed to put the whole country under a state of siege. It may be that there was some truth in the gossip. Gambetta himself, at a meeting of the Committee which shaped the policy of the party, hinted at a rebellion. He had previously planned to oppose a Bourbon restoration by force, and Lyons was to have been the centre of insurrection. It may be that he now revived this scheme ; it may be that he believed, probably without good grounds, that the army would support him against the Marshal. In any case, Grévy sat heavily on the suggestion ; the letter of the law must be observed. At last the Marshal, growling that he would sooner be shot, gave way and sent for Dufaure. Dufaure's terms were not hard. The Ministry must be parliamentary—in other words, must be constituted by its chief, without reservations by the President, and must depend on the confidence of the majority of the Chamber. But if these conditions were satisfied Dufaure considered it would be possible to pursue a policy which was liberal but not radical. By this he meant a policy of material betterment which would evade the more fundamental issues. The Marshal agreed, and Dufaure, in forming his Ministry, made a strong bid for Gambetta's goodwill. He allowed it to be known that he contemplated a heavy programme of public works, and placed Freycinet at the head of the responsible department. The overture was successful. In a short but very important speech delivered at Marseilles in the first week of the new year, Gambetta referred to the forthcoming exhibition and insisted that politics must not be allowed to interfere with its success. The thought of the exhibition explained why he, who had been calm throughout the struggle, was disquieted in the period of truce after battle. He feared the intoxication of victory and appealed for strategic patience. " Now you are masters of the field, do not charge down on the enemy. I beg the party to cry halt, to hold the positions it has conquered, and to strengthen them until they are impregnable." Stripped of its metaphor, this was an invitation to wait until after the senatorial elections. But the senatorial elections lay a whole year ahead.

The Cabinet's programme followed the quiet practical line of which Gambetta had indicated his approval. Its principal feature was the reconstruction, under Freycinet's auspices, of

the transport system of France. A network of new roads, railways and canals was to be completed out of borrowed capital. The Finance Minister shuddered, and it took Gambetta's intervention to win him over to the scheme. Its adoption had political as well as material effect. The Republic proclaimed its readiness to spend money very freely, and under conditions which tempted every deputy to press for something to be done for his own constituency. Unstinted expenditure was part of Gambetta's general policy. By means of public works the savings of Frenchmen were to be directed to the material development of France. On the other hand, the pressure brought to bear on the Government by deputies anxious to keep their seats by getting promises of local railways, stirred Gambetta's wrath. His critics have held him responsible for the system under which electors have been warned that a vote for a candidate unacceptable to the Government of the day will mean ministerial disfavour, suspension of public works, and consequent loss of employment. The criticism is misdirected. So far from inaugurating this method of consolidating the Republic by bargain and barter, Gambetta fought to the end for a reform which would make such transactions impossible—the substitution of departmental elections for single member constituencies.

The more tender issues were tenderly handled. Instead of introducing an Education Bill, the Government proposed to spend 120 million francs on new schools. Instead of purging the army of doubtful elements in its higher ranks, the Government sought to better the lot of the average soldier. This was a task in which Gambetta was glad to collaborate and he was himself responsible for improvements introduced into the pensions system. As he explained in his speech at the Hoche dinner that year, he was never happier than when helping to tighten the bonds between the army and the nation. Meanwhile the reckoning for 16 May remained unpaid. The Government carried an Amnesty Bill which put a stop to all the prosecutions—their total exceeded 2500—on which its predecessors had entered. But the amnesty only established a truce. The Chamber proceeded with its general inquiry. Moreover it examined, one by one, the claims for the invalidation of the elections in which the Marshal's candidates had been victorious. The debates were often stormy. Gambetta repulsed the plea that the amnesty should cover the vanquished as well as the

victors. In wrathful speeches, one of which involved him in a bloodless duel, he called on the Chamber to smoke the Bonapartists out of their holes. The opposition retorted with equally wrathful interruptions, and Grévy was sometimes hard put to it to restore order. In spite of these occasional scenes, however, the Government found itself in smooth water. In the Senate the two centres readily combined in support of its programme. In the Chamber the majority which at first had only consented to vote supplies month by month, gradually relaxed its rigid financial control. By March the situation had so far improved that the Budget Commission of which Gambetta was president spontaneously voted the Marshal an entertainment allowance of half a million francs for the exhibition period. But the Marshal's surliness was not to be overcome. Never once during that festive summer was Gambetta invited to a reception at the Elysée, and it was at a club dinner that he expressed his delight at the recovery of France, and pointed the political moral in language which though tactful was explicit.

In the autumn the period of truce drew near its end. Gambetta, now released from his self-imposed duty of keeping the political sky clear until after the exhibition, availed himself of the recess to tour Provence and Savoy. His triumphs of seven years before were recalled and surpassed. Popular enthusiasm overflowed in flowers and flags. Everywhere he was hailed as the destined chief of a united republican party of action. At Valence his health was proposed by an old republican of the extreme school, a veteran of '48 who had, as he told his audience, helped to build the barricade on which Baudin died. It became clear to Gambetta that his party would no longer be content to support a Government which was not wholly inspired by its ideas. Once more he began to develop his old programme. The administrative staffs must be purged. It was impossible for a ministry further to tolerate a condition of affairs in which it found its worst critics among its own servants. The education question, too, must be tackled now that the new schools were approaching completion. The time was ripe for a first step towards the separation of Church and State. As the autumn wore on Gambetta laid increased stress on the importance of the coming elections when a third of the Senate would be renewed. The result would justify his description of the Senate as the Grand Council of the communes of France. The Republic, he declared in October, was definitely founded, and

the last obstacles to the realization of the national will would be overcome within another few weeks. In December he spoke in Paris. He used the cautious language of a man who felt power to be almost within his grasp, but implied that France would now exact punishment for the wicked intrigue of 16 May. The senatorial elections were fought and won. The republicans carried 66 seats out of 82, and were assured of a majority of over 40 in the Upper House. It seems to have been Gambetta's view that the Marshal would again give way, and he was sure that, once the first mistrust had been overcome, he could co-operate with the loyal old soldier at the Elysée. The Marshal, however, had made up his mind to give up. Now that he could no longer fall back on the Senate, he felt his position impossible. The Chamber met in January and passed a resolution calling on the Cabinet to proceed, now that its hands were free, with its purge of the governing bureaucracy. Worse things were threatened. The Chamber had completed a formidable report on the events of 16 May, and there was talk of impeachments. The Marshal resolved to seize the first opportunity to resign, and found it when a batch of republican military appointments was presented for his signature. There was no crisis. The majority met and accepted Grévy in accordance with the plan laid down by Gambetta on Thiers's death.

Gambetta was ready, and perhaps even anxious, to head the new President's first Cabinet. But Grévy told him that his hour was not yet come, meaning, perhaps, to imply a hope that it was already past. Once more it seemed that the young Republic had no use for its greatest figure. But Grévy was in no mind to leave Gambetta in dangerous isolation. The régime of parliamentary sovereignty was now about to be inaugurated. Would it not be fitting, the new Chief of the State hinted, if the Chamber acknowledged the claims of the man who had brought about this great constitutional victory by paying him the highest compliment in its power? Gambetta himself, now more than ever convinced that he must seek a position above the heat and turmoil of party controversy, was well disposed to the idea.

On the last day of January 1879, the Chamber by a party vote, elected Gambetta to its Presidency—the sovereign seat in the sovereign Parliament.

PART IV—EPILOGUE

XXI

GAMBETTA'S POLICIES AT HOME AND ABROAD

THE Presidency of the French Chamber of Deputies necessarily lacks the prestige with which tradition has clothed the Speakership of the British House of Commons. It is ungraced by the outward splendour attaching to the Presidency of the Republic, and has never acquired the austere dignity which marks the Presidency of the Senate; but it commands, in special measure, the regard of the French people. Its authority is to some extent inherent. Of the three great offices of the French Republic it most nearly reflects the popular will. The Senate remains, at any rate in theory, a brake on the impulses of universal suffrage; and the Senate elects its own President and helps to elect the President of the Republic. But the Chamber springs from the people, and its President, standing out from the mass of undistinguished deputies and the procession of transient ministers, is the symbol of popular sovereignty. But no hint of these qualities was manifested during Grévy's tenure of the chair; they became apparent under Gambetta, and have endured ever since because of his success in vesting the office with something of his own personality.

The Republic was still very young in 1879, and the balance of authority within it remained undetermined. The constitution established a division of powers, and under Thiers and MacMahon the last word rested with the President to the extent that refusal to acquiesce in it at once produced a crisis. But with Grévy's election authority passed to the Chamber, which for the next forty years emphasised its rights by keeping the Presidency somewhat in eclipse; and with the Chamber unwilling to tolerate a Ministry for more than a year at most, it became inevitable that its collective sovereignty should be asserted by its President. Gambetta did not altogether relish

the more personal aspect of the duty which circumstances thus forced upon him. He was aware that Grévy neither liked nor trusted him, and though, in his impulsive way, he tried more than once to put their relations on a more cordial footing, his heart was obviously not in his endeavours. But he was loyalty itself. As he told an audience in his native town, he never appeared before his fellow-republicans without reminding them that it was a citizen's first business to give the head of the State his due of outward respect and inward regard. But just because he was himself the most popular man of his time, his critics, Grévy not least among them, could point the contrast between this language and his policy of exalting the dignity of his own office. Once more it is a question of the last word. As far as a Republic permits it to rest with an individual at all, the choice must lie between the head of the State, who, as MacMahon insisted, is responsible for France to France, and the minister who is principally responsible for policy to Parliament. But during Gambetta's term the last word came to rest more and more with the President of the Chamber who thus emerged, on the whole unconstitutionally, not as the servant and mouthpiece of the House but as its leader and even as its master.

In part this position was forced upon Gambetta by the peculiar circumstances of the time: in part it was assumed by his own deliberate choice. His apologists, anxious that nothing should cloud the fame of their Achilles in his ten years' war for the triumph of the ideas of the Revolution, have indeed put all the blame on Grévy. M. Reinach, in particular, is emphatic in his contention that the new President should have sent for Gambetta on the evening of his election. An English writer must needs walk delicately on the ground of French constitutionalism, but, just because M. Reinach invokes English practice, may submit that there is something to be said on the other side. Gambetta's special place in French politics rested on his justifiable claim to be regarded as the people's choice, the representative of democratic republican opinion. As such, the proper time for him to take office was directly after a general election, when he would truly be called to power by the sovereign voice of France. This was his own view. It accounts for his expectation to be summoned by MacMahon after the election of 1877, and for his readiness to form a Ministry after the election of 1881. But the very nature of his influence made it a little

anomalous for him to take office in a Chamber already fifteen months' old, and beginning to show signs of wear and tear. The fact that, in spite of this difficulty, he loyally placed himself at Grévy's disposal does not weaken the force of this argument. On the contrary, it justifies the President's resolve to keep Gambetta in reserve. For the Chamber, as Grévy found it on his accession to the Presidency, was not in the least the sort of Chamber to maintain Gambetta's ideal Government. Gambetta saw himself the head of a ministry backed by a coherent united majority in the execution of a programme of reforms suited to average republican opinion. There was no such majority; perhaps, indeed, there was no such average opinion. So long as the establishment of the Republic was uncertain, all sections of republicans naturally acted together, and when, a little later on, the future of the established Republic was threatened by the tactics of 16 May, the party again closed its ranks. But when the Republic was definitely secured, sectional groups naturally formed within it. It was all very well for Gambetta to plead that outstanding questions should, as it were, be numbered according to their urgency and importance. Opinion was not yet agreed as to their sequence, and to leave the numbering to Gambetta was to set up a sort of dictatorship. Gambetta's united party was suggested to him by his study of English politics, but its creation as a working majority was prohibited by the conditions of French politics and by the quality of the French mind. A working majority is held together by the strength of the opposition. But the opposition in France was shrivelling away; besides, what remained of it was more or less openly unconstitutional. A working majority further involves a readiness to submit all special issues to considerations of general policy. The French mind has little use for considerations of general policy. They are too vague and fluctuating to make satisfactory intellectual counters. French thought takes its stand on some change, be it in the constitution, or in the organization of society, or in international relations, which points straight at a question of principle. Gambetta himself strove harder than any man of his time to form a general policy. But, in the end, he found all questions swallowed up by the Aaron's rod of departmental election, with its direct reference to the principle of universal suffrage. The term of his presidency saw the gradual development of fission in the republican majority and accounts for the passionate and

in the end monotonous insistence of his later speeches on the necessity for maintaining republican union.

The tendency towards schism was discerned by Grévy's experienced and calculating eye when he assumed the Presidency early in 1879. Dismissing the legitimists as obsolete thanks to the medievalism of the Comte de Chambord, and the Bonapartists as innocuous owing to the dissensions which, in fact, soon destroyed the party after the death of the Prince Imperial had deprived it of its titular head, Grévy studied the left with a view to appointing a ministry which should avoid crises and keep France in her path of order and peace. As he saw it, the left was already broken into five groups. There was the left centre, Thiers's old party, a little out of breath at the pace which events had moved since May 1877; there was the republican left, a group of intellectuals under Ferry, who aimed at ousting the Church from the schools and setting up a national system of education; there was the radical left, spasmodically led by M. Clemenceau, which held many future ministries in the germ but was at present exhibiting purely critical talents; there was the extreme left, which would tolerate no abatement of the ideals of 1848; and somewhere between Ferry and Clemenceau was Gambetta's party persistently endeavouring to gather these diverse political chickens under its leader's comprehensive wing. Grévy came to the conclusion that the best course was to follow MacMahon's policy and to temporize by appointing a ministry which would satisfy the radicals by its vigour in pursuing a strictly liberal policy. Since Dufaure was resolved to retire, Grévy replaced him by his Foreign Minister, Waddington. When Waddington's ministry, after a year of office, died of inanition while fumbling with the question of an amnesty for the communists, Grévy substituted an administration of a more radical colour under Freycinet. When the Freycinet ministry perished in August 1880 of a convulsion produced by the belief that it was too tender towards the Vatican, Grévy naturally commissioned Ferry to form a Government whose anti-clericalism would not be suspect. The Ferry ministry lasted out the Chamber's term, and it was after the elections that Grévy finally turned to Gambetta. It is, no doubt, the case that the President postponed the summons to Gambetta as long as he dared owing to personal feeling. It is certainly the case that he accepted a Gambetta ministry in the sure hope of its speedy downfall. But it is not fair to Grévy, whose solid qualities have been

obscured by the miserable circumstances of his fall, to argue that he was finally guided by his personal feelings. He was guided by his judgment, the shrewdest in France; and the course of events certainly bore out his view that, with the Republic at last triumphant, the country could better be governed by transient ministries based on the fluctuating combinations of groups, than by a homogeneous Cabinet grasping after the fading vision of a solid republican majority.

All this is controversial; there must needs be controversy about the actions of statesmen whose private papers have not yet been published. But one important witness can be called in Grévy's defence—Gambetta himself. From the autumn of 1871 till the autumn of 1877 Gambetta's conduct was inspired by his belief in a united republican party, of which, as he must have realized, he was himself the natural leader though Thiers might be its sponsor before Europe. After the 1877 elections this inspiration began to fail. He realized in his heart, though to the last he refused to admit it in his speeches, that republicanism was dividing and that no one man could gather up its multitudinous tendencies. He did not grip the situation with that firmness which had sustained and justified his opportunist tactics in the past, and notably in the critical session which saw the Republic founded. His health was beginning to fail, and he wavered between two policies. On the one hand was the maintenance of his old ideal, republican union culminating in a ministry headed by himself. To this he reverted in the last resort. On the other hand was the new ambition to create for himself some lofty position above party, from which his influence could powerfully arrest republican disintegration should a crisis threaten. Had he held to the former policy he would never have accepted the presidential chair; had he held to the latter he would never have vacated it. He took the worst of decisions. While allowing himself to be made President of the Chamber, he let it be known that sooner or later he intended to resume his place as a party leader. Because he was a man of genius he accomplished notable things in a position which was false and obscure from start to finish. But these things belong to the postscript of his life. They have a tragic, personal interest of their own; but they do not involve the destinies of France.

Ultimately, no doubt, Gambetta's vacillations were the result of a defect in the constitution of which he must have been conscious but to which he never openly pointed. To have

exposed it would, indeed, have been to reopen the whole constitutional issue as settled in 1875. Ever since 1789, the problem of French politics has been to reconcile individual liberty with a strong executive. The formula of a parliamentary Republic based on universal suffrage offered a solution on one condition, that Parliament was sufficiently conscious of its own strength to trust a ministry. This condition has not been fulfilled—witness the Republic's sixty ministries in forty-five years. The weakness was at first veiled by the fact that real authority was vested in the President. But circumstances changed after May 1877, and from that time onwards Gambetta sought to find some element of power which, while perfectly compatible with Parliament's sovereignty, was not entirely dependent on Parliament's caprice. This is the key to his persistent endeavours, which date from the time of his presidency of the Budget Commission, to create some special position for himself. In the end he came back to the view that a strong ministry would best fill the constitutional gap. By way of making its formation possible he worked to destroy the group system and to substitute a coherent party on the English model; and it was to make such a party possible that he advocated *scrutin de liste*. But this wise appreciation of circumstances was only reached after a number of experiments which had weakened his authority. He could no longer impress his thought either on the country or on the Chamber. He failed to amend the franchise, he failed to unite the party, he failed to form his coalition ministry; and his failure so appalled his successors that for more than a generation they shirked the issue which M. Millerand has at last had the courage to confront.

It was the foreign situation which first led Gambetta to his earlier scheme of giving himself a peculiar status in the republican system. In the autumn of 1877 he accepted the fact that he could never hope to become MacMahon's minister. But what was to happen when the Marshal's term came to an end? In no case would it last beyond 1880, and resignation might close it at any time. The alternative Government would then come into office, but with no Thiers to put at its head. Gambetta was much concerned with the appearance of the Republic before Europe.¹ It was always his policy that France should assume

¹ His general attitude at this time has been summed up for us by an acute observer of affairs in words which history has underlined:

"Francis Knollys to Montagu Corry, Hotel Bristol, Paris, May 7, 1878.

her place among the Powers. But Europe knew nothing of Grévy. He was himself the one republican leader whose name was familiar beyond the confines of France. The situation did not admit of delay. The eastern question had entered on an acute phase, and what Ferry not unfairly called the western question needs must become acute before long. The old Pope was slowly dying, and the next conclave might bring about events which would excite the whole Roman Catholic world and would determine the policy of both Germany and Italy. Touch with Italy could easily be kept. At the end of 1877 Gambetta went to Rome, his journey giving rise to very vigorous press comments. He returned satisfied that Italy and France could stand together on a policy which while respectful of religious belief would never palter with the sovereign rights of the civil power. Scarcely had he returned when Victor Emmanuel died. The King was reconciled to the Church before the end and a memorial service was held in Paris. Gambetta attended. Rome, he said, was well worth a Mass. The occasion enabled him to give public proof of his sincerity in distinguishing between faith and politics. His cherished view that religious belief had no essential connection with political acts and that clerical intervention in politics therefore pursued some purely secular aim, seems inexplicable in our own age which has come to realize that thought and conduct ultimately derive from faith. But it must be remembered that the clericalism of the 'seventies had not yet separated the spiritual authority of the Pope from his temporal power, and that, largely through the influence of Comte, it was widely held that policy could be reasoned out. That faith remains faith even when expressed in intellectual terms was a truth not clear to the men of that generation and the fact goes far to explain their obstinate doctrinairism. Gambetta was at least more enlightened than most of his fellows in that he saw how greatly events would be influenced by the personality of the new Pope. When Pius IX followed his enemy to the grave a month later, Gambetta showed himself

The Prince of Wales desires me to ask you to let Lord Beaconsfield know that since H. L.H. wrote to him, he has met Gambetta. . . . They had a long conversation together in the course of which Gambetta expressed his hearty approval of every step taken by Lord Beaconsfield in connection with the Eastern Question, and his strong dislike to the doctrine that all nations having large armies at their command might upset all treaties in defiance of protests from those concerned and contrary to public law."—Buckle. "Life of Disraeli," Vol. vi. pp. 631-2.

familiar with the currents of opinion in the conclave. He hailed the election of Cardinal Pecci with deep satisfaction, expressed his pleasure at the new Pope's choice of the name Leo with its rich tradition of papal diplomacy, and ventured on the hope that France might yet conclude a "marriage of reason" with the Church. Henceforward touch was kept between the Vatican and the man who had denounced clericalism as the enemy.

In the course of 1879 the Pope and Gambetta exchanged views, of course through intermediaries. Each submitted his policy to the other. To Leo XIII's suggestion that the French clergy might, under certain conditions, rally to the Republic, Gambetta replied that the price asked was too high. The Pope in his turn listened with diplomatic reserve to Gambetta's French version of Cavour's plan for a free church in a free state. In the fullness of time more was to be heard of the alternatives first put forward in 1879.

When Gambetta went to Rome at the end of 1879 he was initiating a policy which, if successful, must eventually lead to conversations with Bismarck. Conditions in France, Italy, and Germany had this much in common that in all three countries the leading statesman held their respective Governments to be threatened by clerical reaction. If the threat developed they were prepared to meet it in concert. Bismarck, as was his way, was beforehand in facing the prospect and had established relations with Gambetta through the medium of Count Henkel Donnersmarck. Crispien helped matters on by his visits to Paris and Berlin, and Gambetta himself, as the heir of Thiers's policies, was prepared to explore the prospects of an accommodation with the German Empire. The need for action became more obvious as the time for discussion of the eastern question drew nearer. Bismarck had offered his services as honest broker and a European Congress was shortly to assemble at Berlin. The choice of the German capital emphasized the ambiguities of France's international position. Could her representative go to Berlin at all, and if he went was he to represent a France ready to take a definite status as a European power, or a France for whom there was still no international question except Alsace-Lorraine? As the spring wore on Gambetta perceived the error of his original view that France could proudly and sorrowfully hold aloof from the forthcoming Congress. But if France was to be represented at Berlin, there must be some pre-

liminary arrangement with Germany, and the only Frenchman with authority to effect it was himself. He realized how greatly a visit to Berlin would prejudice him in the eyes of French patriots—Spuller and Madame Adam, for example, were horrified and indignant at the thought of it—but was willing to take the risk. Bismarck, who appreciated both his difficulties and his strength of character, made it clear that he would be treated with all honour, and a visit was actually arranged for the end of April. Gambetta's programme was to create tolerable relations with the conqueror. Their outward symbol was to be German participation in the exhibition of 1878. But Gambetta had in view something far more thoroughgoing than a harmless piece of international courtesy. The Treaty of Frankfort was not accepted as a final settlement by either party. On both sides of the Rhine there had begun a competition in armaments which, if not arrested, must sooner or later lead to war. Gambetta aimed at ending this dangerous rivalry. Great consequences might thus be expected of the Berlin conversations, but when all was in train Gambetta alleged pressure of parliamentary business and postponed his visit indefinitely. His motives are still somewhat obscure and will not be finally elucidated until his private papers are published in full. But three reasons appear to have weighed with him. In the first place it had become apparent that France could honourably be represented at the Berlin Congress which would be concerned wholly with the settlement of eastern affairs. In the second place the conciliatory policy of the new Pope had already conjured away the clerical danger. In the third place—and this was the decisive matter—there was a misunderstanding about Alsace-Lorraine. It would be ridiculous to suppose that Gambetta hoped, by the mere force of his oratory, to induce Bismarck to restore the Lost Provinces, though the Germans have contributed this fiction to the Gambettist legend. But he thought that Bismarck might sympathize with his belief in an immanent justice in human affairs and might even agree that sooner or later the people of Alsace-Lorraine should be allowed to decide whether they were French or German. A letter to Ranc published in M. Deschanel's biography suggests that he would have been willing to facilitate the redemption of the Lost Provinces by the sacrifice of colonial territory. He found, however, that Bismarck regarded the issue as closed and was not prepared to discuss it at all. On realizing the

fact he broke off the negotiations abruptly and at short notice.

Bismarck never forgave him. Using the subterranean machinery of intrigue at his command, the Chancellor persistently sought to discredit Gambetta in the eyes of his countrymen. Two opposite charges were laid against him, the one that he was prepared to forsake his own past and to acquiesce in the surrender of the two provinces, the other that he had rejected a friendly German overture and was hot on a policy of revenge. The campaign of misrepresentation grew steadily in volume until at last Gambetta resolved to make a reply. It is characteristic of his caution in all international matters that in spite of provocation he kept silence for more than two years. But in the summer of 1880 his chance seemed to have come. The national festival on 14 July had been celebrated by the gift of new standards to the army to replace those so tragically lost at Sedan and Metz. The navy's turn followed, and early in August the Presidents of the Republic, the Senate, and the Chamber inspected the fleet at Cherbourg. The presence of the "Enchantress" with the First Lord on board gave an international character to the festivities. Gambetta thought it an appropriate occasion to express his views on the place of France in the world. He could hardly have chosen a worse opportunity. The enthusiasm with which he was greeted, when contrasted with the respectful welcome accorded to the President of the Republic, in itself conveyed the impression that he was wrenching his office out of its proper rank in the constitution; and the impression was intensified when he made a pronouncement at a gathering held in his honour to which the head of the State was not invited at all. Gambetta's opening sentences, in which he deprecated, after his manner, any special tribute to himself did not suffice to mend matters. The passage which caused the storm followed on his reference to his visit to Cherbourg ten years before. "Fortune went against us and in the subsequent decade we have not uttered one boastful or reckless word. There are periods in the history of peoples when justice suffers eclipse; but it is the duty of peoples, in such disastrous times, to maintain control over themselves. Wait in patience. In great things reparation may be made as a matter of right. We or our children may expect it with hope; the future is free to all. And now let me touch on a criticism levelled against me in this connexion. Objection is sometimes

taken to my passionate devotion to the army which in these days concentrates in itself the whole strength of the nation, being no longer recruited from professional soldiers but from the young blood of France. I am rebuked for giving too much time to the progress in the art of war by which our country is made safe from danger. Let me tell you that my devotion is not inspired or impelled by any bellicose temper but by the necessity of regenerating France, whom I have seen fall so low, that she may resume her place in the world. It is for this ideal that my heart beats and not for any bloodstained satisfaction. My aim is that what is left of France may not be dismembered; and that we may put our trust in the future which will tell us whether there is a justice immanent in all things here below and ready to assert itself when its day comes and its hour strikes."

Some time later Gambetta took occasion to point out that no criticism was passed upon this speech until a week after its delivery. Doubtless the instigation to attack it originally came from Berlin. Henceforward it was Bismarck's cue to treat Gambetta as a rowdy bungler. The remark that he got on Europe's nerves like a man banging a drum in an invalid's room belongs to Gambetta's Premiership, and was quietly circulated among the diplomatists. But at this time Bismarck prepared a ruder blow. When the storm was at its height the "*Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*" delivered the Chancellor's vengeance for the cancelled interview of April 1878. "If republican France under M. Gambetta's leadership," it wrote, "wishes to continue the tradition of monarchical France, and to walk in the footsteps of Louis XIV and Louis XV, of Napoleon I and Napoleon III, then we must make up our minds that we cannot look forward to a long peace." The threat was nicely calculated to affect the prevalent temper of the French public. A change, the degree of which Gambetta never properly grasped, had come over the popular will. The great impulse which had carried France through the years of material and constitutional reconstruction had worn itself out. The festivities of the exhibition year had eased the strain, and from that time onwards France was inclined to resent any stimulus to further efforts, and was anxious only for tranquillity. Particularly did she distrust any forward move in international affairs. As Gambetta's ill-luck had it, the Cherbourg speech coincided with a slight recrudescence of the

eastern question. Certain points left over from the Berlin Congress proved hard to settle. Greco-Turkish relations became strained, and it was discovered from a document in a British blue-book that France was selling surplus rifles to Greece. Spurred on by Germany, opinion took the alarm. Gambetta knew all about the transaction ; Gambetta had forced the scheme on a reluctant Government ; Gambetta had carried it through without the knowledge of the Government ; Gambetta wanted war with Turkey, with Russia, with Germany, with all three. The "Figaro" printed and distributed 100,000 copies of a pamphlet—an adroit medley of quotations—entitled "Gambetta means war." His insistence that France must assume her proper place in Europe was regarded as an incitement to a policy of adventure. For the first time he ceased to be in harmony with the average republican sentiment of France. But he was an obstinate man, and could bide his time. Nearly ten months after the Cherbourg speech he visited his birthplace in order to unveil a monument to the men of his department who had fallen in the war. Here was an occasion on which he must needs refer to the dangerous topic of relations with Germany, and even his worst enemies might have admired the noble patriotism of his answer to the invective with which he had been bespattered. "France," he declared, "has but one care, but one desire—to uphold her honour and the peace which it assures her. Do not be misled by assertions that the strong and efficient army formed under our new military arrangements is a standing menace to the peace of Europe. No—a lasting peace, such as assures a people's distant future, can only rest on a truly national army, representative of all the country's youth and vigour and energy. You have such an army, and whatever rumours may reach your ears, be assured that you are yourselves its masters. Nothing can be determined without the approval of the nation, and who could controvert the will of France ? "

Bismarck has done infinite harm to Gambetta's reputation in international affairs. To Bismarck is due the idea, which is still current, that Gambetta went about Foreign Offices shouting Down with Germany and Down with the Pope. Misrepresentation could not be more preposterous. As Gambetta himself explained to Cardinal Lavigerie's secretary, his anti-clericalism was not intended for exportation, not even to Algeria. Still less was it intended as a guiding principle of his foreign policy,

though it was to be used as an instrument to secure Italy's friendship and to counter Bismarck's intrigues. Nor did Gambetta hope to fight an early and successful war of revenge. He visited Germany in 1876—clipping his beard to escape recognition—and returned profoundly impressed with the vigour and efficiency of Bismarck's new-made Empire. German nationalism, he perceived, was still an expanding force, and Gambetta's policy during the closing years of his life was to safeguard France by arresting its further progress. Gradually he saw his way. In the middle 'seventies he wrote to Madame Adam the famous letter which is perhaps the crowning instance of his prophetic insight. Where, he asked, would the force be found which would eventually cry halt to Germany? Looking about Europe, he pointed to the Southern Slavs. Sooner or later, he held, the rivalry between Germany and Russia for supremacy in central Europe would come to an issue on the lower Danube. Gambetta was disinclined to the idea of opposing Southern Slav nationalism to German aggression. This plan was certainly premature in his day, and he felt that such a policy would only stimulate German national feeling to the further detriment of France. His proposal was to strengthen Austria, a power which Germany threatened to swallow and Russia to destroy. When Bismarck put an end to this notion by signing his treaty of alliance with Austria, Gambetta began to look towards Russia. He was, however, anxious not to force the pace. If France allied herself with Russia while still weak and isolated, she would be dragged into the train of Russian policy. Gambetta therefore sought to make the alliance worth Russia's while by first effecting an understanding between France and Russia's then rival, Britain. He expressed the view that such a policy would command the approval of the Prince of Wales—a view which the Prince was to justify after his accession many years later. As the friend of Britain and the ally of Russia, France would be in a position to resume the leadership of the Latin Powers, and Gambetta saw her heading a union which would include Italy, Spain, and Roumania. Time was never given Gambetta to carry these lofty aspirations into effect, though during his short Premiership he laboured indefatigably but vainly to ensure an understanding with Britain. His ideas thus never assumed practical importance, but the mere fact that they were cherished is proof that he did not contemplate an early war with Germany. When once he became

aware that Bismarck was thoroughly stiff-necked over Alsace-Lorraine, his insight told him that some twenty years must elapse before France could again open the question. His conclusion helped to estrange him from some of his oldest political friends, and since his position in Frenchmen's hearts made it impossible for him to declare it, he had to endure in silence while his enemies, their party malice adroitly stirred by Bismarck, proclaimed him war-monger and firebrand.

It must be admitted that, in these days of Gambetta's slowly waning popularity his opponents needed no stimulus from abroad. Scarcely had he begun to soothe the apprehensions created by his Cherbourg speech when there was a change in the incidence of their attack. It was now charged against him that he was the advocate of reckless colonial expansion. As president of the Budget Commission he had given a somewhat hesitating approval to certain colonial credits, and he was in sympathy with the view that Algeria should henceforth be treated as a part of France, and should be administered not by a soldier commanding in chief but by a civil governor after the fashion of an exalted departmental prefect. No doubt he shared the general dissatisfaction with Grévy's conduct in securing the appointment of his own brother as first occupant of the post, but he would not allow the President to be attacked in the House. The constitution, he ruled, made the President irresponsible, and the introduction of his name into debate was therefore out of order. The ruling was undoubtedly sound, and gave no indication of Gambetta's personal views; and it was not until early in 1881 that he could be regarded as a declared supporter of colonial development. By this date the financial difficulties in which Tunis was entangled clamoured for authoritative settlement and France resolved to take the matter into her own hands at the risk of Turkish protests, British uneasiness, and Italian indignation. A strong expeditionary force was sent out, and its commander concluded a satisfactory treaty with the Bey on 12 May. On hearing the news, Gambetta sent a very cordial note of congratulation to Ferry, the then Premier. France, he declared, had now resumed her place as a Great Power. The note was dated Friday the 13th, but, as Gambetta added after the date, what did superstitions matter? Unfortunately the treaty did not end the enterprise. French opinion was disturbed by the despatch of troops out of France, and a part of the expeditionary force was sent home

prematurely. In the summer a revolt broke out. The Government atoned for its former error by sending out strong reinforcements, but the fighting continued during the election campaign, and the Tunis expedition and Gambetta's part in its despatch became a main issue of the contest. The suspicious public flatly refused to believe the news that order had been restored, and opinion was still inflamed when the new Chamber met in the late autumn. It was one of Gambetta's difficulties on the formation of his Ministry that he was left to wind up a policy of whose inception he had indeed approved but for whose execution he was in no way responsible. His liquidation of this unexpected inheritance was to be the one success of his brief and difficult Premiership.

While Gambetta was thus estranging himself from his party by his attitude on external questions, the party itself was beginning to disintegrate on matters of domestic policy. The trouble dated from MacMahon's resignation, when some of its more extreme members pressed for the impeachment of the Duc de Broglie and his colleagues. Foiled in this, they agitated for a thorough-going revision of the constitution so that it should be brought into harmony with the principles of 1848. This procedure involved the suppression of the Senate and even of the Presidency—suggestions which horrified the moderates without whose support Gambetta could not hope to carry his programme of constructive reform. In the hope of composing a threatening situation he ultimately fell back on what he sincerely regarded as a perfect remedy, the institution of the system of departmental election which would enable all varieties of republican opinion to be put into the party's list of candidates and to be supported by the amalgamated republican vote. But since the change would involve constitutional revision and would thus open the door to further proposals, Gambetta held it in reserve, and only committed himself to it after experimenting with two other policies—another example of his weakening grip on opinion. The policy which he most favoured was in its essence anti-clerical. It was sound enough in that opposition to priestly influence on politics was one of the dogmas of the republican party, and, in the end, it was carried through to its logical conclusion. But Gambetta had no wish to proceed to extremes. His aim was to reach some sort of understanding with the Church and he proposed that the Republic should show its strength by insisting on strict observance of the letter

of the concordat. In 1880, therefore, Gambetta began to put pressure on Freycinet to suppress the Jesuits' schools which had long been tolerated but were, in strict law, unauthorized. After Freycinet's limited scheme had broken down, Gambetta supported his successor, Ferry, in his first uncertain days of office and encouraged him in his initial plans for the establishment of that great system of national education which makes his name memorable in French history. Gambetta himself was keenly interested in education by lay teachers, and was always ready to take the chair at meetings in aid of the funds of public libraries and secular schools. But the credit of the legislation is entirely Ferry's. In spite of mutual goodwill—to the last they used the "tu" of intimacy—the two men could not work together. Where could such a temperament as Gambetta's find its points of affinity with Ferry, an intellectual of great perseverance but little vision, and quite without the knack of acquiring popularity? Indeed Gambetta might well have refused the somewhat hesitating support he gave Ferry throughout 1881, but for the fact that his alternative policy had been disappointing in its results.

There is no better example of Gambetta's opportunism than his attitude to the question of an amnesty for the communists. In the early days of the National Assembly he had voted for it. Later on, when busy with negotiations for the establishment of the Republic, he had preferred not to touch so dangerous a sleeping dog. In 1877, when he expected to take office under Thiers, an amnesty again figured in his programme but was quietly dropped after Thiers's death. Grévy thought it inexpedient, and Gambetta had no desire to press the matter since communists were steadily released by the action of the prerogative of mercy.

But in 1880 the issue presented itself in a new light. At the beginning of the session Gambetta had been re-elected to the chair; but his majority showed a drop of sixty-five votes—the result of the abstention of the radicals and extremists. A few weeks later there was a bye-election at Bordeaux. Bordeaux had been Gambettist since 1870, and the official republican candidate was a local journalist of repute, one of Gambetta's earliest friends. But an ex-communist was put up against him and was elected. Gambetta sounded Freycinet, but found him unwilling to introduce a comprehensive Bill. The spring wore on and Paris became restive. The capital had

anticipated that the return of the Chamber and its own tranquil demeanour during the session would lead to the complete obliteration of the past. Further delays threatened to enable the extreme left to sweep Paris at the next election. Under Gambetta's direction, the republicans brought pressure to bear on Freycinet. July 14 had just been chosen as the date on which the Republic should annually celebrate its establishment. The selection of this historic anniversary gave the Premier an excuse for changing his mind, and a Bill was introduced which it was intended to pass before the national holiday. At the time that the measure was tabled a municipal election was in progress in Paris. A communist stood and Gambetta, speaking on behalf of his moderate opponent, laid stress on the coming Bill. The result was declared in the short interval between the introduction of the Bill and its discussion. The communist headed the poll and the House was obviously shocked. Gambetta, who was attacked as the influence behind the Bill, left the chair and made a speech which saved it. He grappled at once with the argument that the promise of an amnesty had failed to satisfy the Paris extremists. After nine years, he declared, it was too late for promises. Nothing but the definite passage of a Bill would put an end to recriminatory votes. He passed to the argument that, for the sake of appeasing Paris, it was proposed to pass a measure which was not endorsed by general opinion. France, he admitted, showed no ardour or enthusiasm for an amnesty. She was, however, thoroughly weary of the whole question, and wanted it out of the way. But if the time had come to make an end, the necessary steps must be taken before the next election. Otherwise the issue would be argued out on every platform in the country, and the old bitterness between Paris and the provinces would be revived. Finally, an amnesty would make a good impression on Europe. Only a few months before, foreign Powers had regarded France with a touch of suspicion. But her Government was now respected and free from all implication of revolutionary extremism. Now, therefore, was the moment for France to give a quiet demonstration of confidence in herself.

The speech converted a hostile house and ended an agitation which might have become dangerous. For the one and only time during his Presidency, Gambetta satisfied his own ideal and from a position above and beyond party exercised a decisive influence upon events.

Such direct intervention was exceptional, but Gambetta nevertheless exercised a very real control over legislation. He was a strong President, able to check disorder, by no means timid in the exercise of his power, and resolute to keep the House at work. He was never tired of enforcing the doctrine that the Republic must prove itself by showing its ability to pass constructive legislation. This was the theme of his first speech on taking the chair, of his reply to a deputation of his constituents who came to congratulate him on his election, of his address to the Chamber when it first resumed its sessions in Paris. Nor did mere words content him. He worked hard at the details of Bills and thought it his duty to assist ministers in getting them through. Much credit is due to him for the volume of useful legislation passed by the Chamber during the three sessions of his Presidency. Particular success attended his efforts during the eight months of Freycinet's Premiership. But after Freycinet had given way to Ferry the condition for easy collaboration ceased to exist. There was lobby gossip about the hidden hand behind the Government. The falseness of Gambetta's position as revealed to a later generation in Freycinet's "Souvenirs" was now first becoming manifest. Was he responsible for legislation or was he not? In February 1881, he intervened with an emphatic protest against the fables and legends in circulation. He denied in the strongest terms that he was exercising any secret pressure. Never, he declared in language which indicates a certain degree of self-deception, had he brought any weight to bear either on the opinions or on the decisions of the Government. But he went on to make a statement which showed that he realized his position was becoming untenable, and forecasted its abandonment after the elections. "When I am called upon to play another part, I shall accept responsibility for my acts. The Government policy has my confidence, but it is a confidence given with my eyes shut. It is not my present business to say whether I have a policy of my own or whether my policy differs from the Cabinet's. I can wait." Gambetta concluded by declaring in aggressive vein that the attacks on him were nothing but anti-republican manoeuvres, that the assertion that he stood for war was an electioneering dodge, and that he would maintain his reserve until the country summoned him to another post.

There was no prospect of permanence about an arrangement

which kept a Government in office for just so long as a man who knew how to wait chose to keep his eyes shut. Realizing the position, Gambetta was at pains, especially in the year before the elections, to get into touch with the business world of moderate men whom he was anxious to conciliate. As President of the Chamber he attended meetings of Chambers of Commerce and preached his favourite gospel of steady progress through republican union. He exerted himself to make clear his attitude towards education. It was not to be regarded as a training for universal suffrage, which had an authority of its own. But education certainly extended the range of popular interests, and Gambetta expressed the hope that the nineteenth century would cover the surface of France with schools as the twelfth had covered it with churches.

Gambetta's extra-parliamentary activities lent point to the charge that he was giving an unconstitutional extension to his office. It was a charge which he regarded as ridiculous. From the moment of his election he thought it his duty to devote the prestige of his position to the service of the Republic. He moved at once to the presidential quarters at the Palais Bourbon although the Chamber was still sitting at Versailles, and threw his doors open to the cosmopolitan society of the capital. It was his method of illustrating the comprehensiveness of the Republic. But his party complained. They protested that their leader was being cut off from them by his new friends and flatterers. The attacks on him assumed a more personal tone, as was inevitable when he ceased to take a definite part in affairs. It was no longer clear what he was doing, and attention was directed to his personal characteristics—his genial habits, his open-handed ways, his ever ready tongue. Malicious critics objected to the man of the people lunching with the Prince of Wales. They held it outrageous that he should exhibit the splendours of his office, and directed their venom against the luxury of his table and the opulence of his bathroom. Gambetta treated these attacks lightly—perhaps too lightly, for evil gossip always finds some credit, and it was not generally understood that the means of which he now showed himself possessed had been honourably obtained by the sale of the "*Petite République française*." But when the abuse extended to his friends he was moved to wrath. An infamous suggestion that Challemel-Lacour, his best colleague in his newspaper work, had been caught cheating at cards, induced him to put on his advocate's

gown for the first and last time since the fall of the Empire. In a dignified passage of protest against the denigration of public men, he declared that the behaviour of malignant reactionaries was an offence against republican freedom of speech and demanded that the abuse should be severely dealt with, as in England. He contented himself, however, with asking for 10,000 francs damages, and this sum was awarded by the Court. But his appearance in this case was an isolated act to which he was impelled by his strong personal friendship for his libelled colleague. As for his own happiness, no obloquy could touch it, for he sought it elsewhere than in the official salons of the Palais Bourbon.

XXII

ROMANCE

NOT long after his election to the Legislative Body Gambetta became aware of the agreeable fact that he was an object of interest to a lady in the public galleries. She was a beautiful woman, not tall, but very stately, with wonderful hair, a high white forehead, perfect eyebrows, and a fine, daintily modelled nose. In the only portrait which appears to be extant the line of the mouth is a trifle hard, but one who knew her has described it as seductive. She was not a lady with whom acquaintance could lightly be claimed, and in later years her manner towards Gambetta's intimate friends was marked by a certain reserve. Gambetta at first received no encouraging sign. But one day, after he had made a speech with her eyes on him all the while, he came down from the tribune, and, still hot with the excitement of debate, scribbled a note. He gave it to an usher to take to the lady with the black gloves, and watched the result. The unknown read the note attentively, paused, then tore it up and left the gallery.

The hurricane had passed over France before he set eyes on her again. Once more he saw her in the public gallery of the Parliament, now the National Assembly and in session at Versailles. Once more he risked a note. This time she did not tear it up but placed it in the fold of her bodice. But she gave no other sign and again passed out of his life. At last—it was in the autumn of 1872—they met by accident at the house of a mutual friend. Gambetta insisted on further conversation, and she gave him a rendezvous for the following morning in the Park at Versailles, hard by the Petit Trianon. There, at eight o'clock on a November day, she told him her story. Her name was Léonie Léon. Her father had been an officer of rank and distinction, but his later days were clouded by some mysterious tragedy which finally drove him to suicide. Thrown on the world, the young girl obtained an engagement in Paris as

governess in the household of some court functionary, and was seduced by her employer. She had been drawn to Gambetta by that devotion which he inspired in many men but in few women. She was, however, firm in her view that she was not the sort of person whom he could know without prejudice to his career. Her explanation made, she wished to disappear from his life again.

But Gambetta would not hear of it. The mystic that was in him drew him to his affinity, or rather to his goddess, for it was in no empty compliment that he was wont to call her his Pallas Athene. Their talk turned to politics. She told him the truth at once. For all her admiration of him, she was a devout Catholic. Gambetta assured her that he would never fail in respect towards her faith. He kept his word, and their difference on so fundamental an issue never affected their relations. It mattered in one thing only—it prevented their marriage. More than once in later years he pressed her to complete his happiness by saying one little word before the mayor. Her faith forbade. Her word could only be given before a priest, and Gambetta, true to his convictions, refused to contract a religious marriage. The difficulty was to some extent overcome thanks to the tactful and accommodating temper of her confessor. "Some time ago," she wrote to him, "you gave me verbal instruction and explanation in the matter of betrothal. I am truly grateful for your words which took a great weight off my mind. If I understood you correctly, the Church recognizes two sorts of betrothals, *sponsalia de presente* and *sponsalia de futuro*. In cases of necessity, the former—betrothals by immediate vow—are identical in the eyes of the Church with the sacrament of marriage. They amounted, you told me, to a contract under the terms of which a man and a woman declared themselves to be married to one another. On the other hand the latter ceremony—betrothal by future vows—was a declaration by the parties that they intended to marry at some future date.

"I must now inform you, Father, that on your advice I have to-day celebrated by immediate vows my betrothal with the man whose name is known to you. I trust that you will approve and will not withhold your blessing."

This remarkable letter signalized the opening of a wonderful and exquisite romance. What had happened was that Gambetta, keeping tryst in Versailles Park, had solemnly put upon her

finger a ring with the inscription : " Hors cet anneau point n'est d'amour." The gift made them man and wife. When, years afterwards, Madame Adam credited a rumour of Gambetta's engagement to a lady of wealth and position, he sent her an angry letter railing out against her sex as capable of anything and responsible for nothing. Yet Madame Adam's error was pardonable, for the marriage which Gambetta had informally contracted was kept very secret. Even M. Reinach never met Madame Léon—as Gambetta's friends subsequently called her with convenient ambiguity—until after her husband's death. During the days of his greatness she did not live with him, though she sometimes dined with him at the offices of the " République française." She was never to be found in the Palais Bourbon. They spent their holidays together, but otherwise their meetings were brief and not very frequent. But time only made his love the more ardent, and he begged her with increasing vehemence to put their relations on a more regular footing. The thought that the acceptance of an official position would separate him yet more completely from the woman he loved weighed heavily with him in his later years. It explains both his immediate and emphatic refusal to become a candidate for the Presidency of the Republic after Thiers's death and his indifference to the growing difficulties of his position as President of the Chamber. When political clouds gathered he turned away from them to contemplate the fair but visionary horizons of domestic happiness. Would she not marry him and live with him in quiet retirement in Switzerland or Italy? On the very eve of the formation of his ministry he wrote that he would abandon everything at a word from her. The word was not spoken, nor did he seriously await it; their fates still gripped them. Only when his last effort had ended in swift disaster, did the lovers feel that at last their lives could be consecrated to their love. They agreed to make a home together somewhere near Paris, where, even in his time of eclipse, Gambetta would not be altogether out of touch with affairs. The district of their choice was Ville d'Avray, midway between Paris and Versailles. There Balzac had once planned a magnificent château for himself and had collapsed under the load of debt in which his project had involved him. In the grounds there was a gardener's cottage, originally meant for one of Balzac's secretaries. Gambetta bought this cottage and a bit of adjacent land in June 1882 for 100,000 francs. The first instalment of the purchase

money was paid at once and the transaction was to be completed within a year. Within a year Gambetta was dead, but his brother-in-law found the money, and the tiny house, Les Jardies, was dedicated by him to Gambetta's memory. It remains as he left it, and the visitor finds it hard to believe that the man whom it was common form to taunt with his love of the magnificent chose it as an adequate home. It did not even contain the two living rooms which were essential to a couple who would necessarily receive many guests, and a salon was formed by building out on to the adjacent ground. The narrow room with its zinc roof must have been stifling during the only summer that they spent together.

The two were man and wife at last, and it was as his dear wife that, in spite of her reluctance, Gambetta began to make her known to his inner circle of friends. But in the worldly view they were still unmarried. All through the spring and summer Gambetta pressed her to make his happiness perfect. The marriage appears to have been arranged for October. But the old hitch was never overcome. The nature of the ceremony could not be determined. The marriage was postponed from October till 1 December. But 1 December was too late. Four days earlier Gambetta had met with the accident which was to bring his life to its premature end. It would seem, though the full facts have not yet been revealed, that Madame Léon had consented to a civil marriage but was afterwards overcome by religious scruples. Her conduct was matter of infinite grief to her in later years.

Because of their enforced separation there sprang up between them a correspondence which will one day be read in full. After Gambetta's death Madame Léon made a selection of his letters for submission to his intimate friends, that they might appreciate the part she had played in his life. The selection remained private until her long widowhood of thirty-three years had reached its end. But so soon as her death, early in 1906, had removed the need for reticence, these letters, about 200 in number, were published in the "*Revue de Paris*." A few months later, the full story of Gambetta's love was told by M. François Laur. M. Laur was among the master's most fervent disciples. Their relations appear to have opened during Gambetta's dictatorship. M. Laur, who then occupied an official position in Algeria, distinguished himself by his zeal in despatching troops and stores to France. Gambetta took note

of him, summoned him to Tours, and gave him a post on the armaments commission. The friendship thus begun was permanent, but M. Laur does not explain how he came to be admitted into the great secret of Gambetta's life. His book, however, makes it clear that he was received into Madame Léon's full confidence, though it is not easy to say how far his information was derived from herself during her later years, and how far from her one or two intimate friends after her death. But he wrote his narrative under the sense that he was exceptionally fitted to discharge a duty which he felt to be both pious and national. He has a very fragrant, very moving tale to tell. He feels that he is writing one of the great love stories of history, and he is resolute that it shall lack nothing in vividness. Accordingly he throws it into dramatic form and puts, for example, actual speeches into the lovers' mouths when they meet in the Park at Versailles. It is not clear whether these speeches are wholly imaginary or whether they are based on Madame Léon's recollections of what was actually said. But, in any case, the outline is true, and the letters are, of course, authentic. Selected, as they were, to explain and justify a personal relationship, the letters are intimate—so intimate that it seems an intrusion to read them, and an impropriety to exhibit them, in cold-blooded translation, as biographical data. They have accordingly been drawn on without explicit reference, but for the sake of historical completeness and accuracy one example must be cited here. By no means the most ardent of the series, this letter was written after Gambetta had returned from a brief Italian holiday with Madame Léon. It reveals the splendour of his devotion—his whole heart was in his love as it was in all that he did—and gives some hint of the effort it must have cost him to return to the hubbub of political life. But for the sake of France he forsook the most perfect domestic happiness, and faced the obloquy and vituperation which were his portion beyond the measure even of French politicians.

“MY DARLING AND IDOL.

I wish I could lay all the treasure of the world at your feet, to make an offering worthy of you and of the wonderful cure you are working in your worshipper. I emerge from our indescribable and too short Odyssey altogether happy and altogether free from the cares which overwhelmed me a month

ago.¹ I know not whether I still dream, but I feel within me and about me the assurance that I am free and at peace. I bless you and love you just as the sick man, cured by a miracle, can love and bless the image which is his God. After all, are not you all my faith and all the prop of my life? When I first met you I hardly suspected that the day would come when, my last illusion gone, I should look to you for the joy and hope I needed if I was to go on fighting. I thought that I had to love you for my heart's sake, and now all that I want and all that I am worth depends on you, is strengthened by your influence, is made real by the confidence you give me. When you gave your loving and devoted heart into my keeping, you thought it right to yield your brain and brave spirit as well. Now you can see that you are really worth more than the rest of the world, and that mine is a love that can stand the strain of time and trials. I send you my thanks, my kisses and my prayers to see you again on Saturday. To-morrow I will tell you of my morning and evening conversations. May your spirit help and inspire me. I kiss your brow."

The correspondence, as we have it so far, is a curious medley—her wonderful self, his love for her, his political plans, France. As time goes on she becomes his main theme, but from the first his tone has the simplicity of true passion. The letters thus exhibit the development of his love, but they do not trace the current of his thought. In its complete form, however, the correspondence must illuminate every detail of Gambetta's life, give the ideas behind his speeches and acts, and offer such excuses as he thought necessary for his cautious opportunism. M. Reinach, who has read it all, declares that while it reveals Gambetta's inmost mind, it will not affect the historical estimate of his character. No other verdict was to be expected, for Gambetta was an entirely honest man, and held France just because he spoke from his heart. But in the letters, if anywhere, will be found the secret of Gambetta's tempestuous, exuberant, provocative, overwhelming personality which underlies his speeches, flashes through Madame Adam's memoirs, and is the basis and explanation of the remarkable Gambettist legend. The letters will tell the world, too, what it does not

¹ Three months earlier he had written to his father: "I am overwhelmed with work. The task is killing me. I have not a minute to myself. The two newspapers, my visits, the Budget, foreign politics, the elections . . . the burden is too heavy for me." (25 April, 1876.)

yet know, Gambetta's private opinion of the men with whom he was brought into association or conflict—MacMahon, Grévy, the Duc de Broglie, and the rest. It is just because of their candour that these papers have not yet been published. But the old reasons for reticence have passed; everything before August 1914 is ancient history now; and it is to be hoped that when M. Reinach's papers come to be examined he will be found to have done for Gambetta's letters what he has already done for his speeches. When published the collection will presumably run into several volumes. The letters cover a period of over eight years, from the beginning of the love story late in 1872 to the final union in 1881. Gambetta wrote, and wrote fully, every day that they were apart, and Madame Léon seems never to have destroyed a letter.

The incompleteness of the available record makes it impossible to estimate the extent or even the character of Madame Léon's influence upon Gambetta's thought and conduct. M. Laur asserts that it was decisive, and even makes her the real author of his opportunism, but M. Laur is Madame Léon's champion. At least, however, we know that all political issues were discussed between them and that Gambetta submitted his forthcoming speeches to her in outline. We know, too, that he attached great weight to her views on foreign affairs, that her influence brought him to the verge of an interview with Bismarck in 1878, and that she was his confidential envoy to Pope Leo in 1879. We may also attribute to her his insistence, sometimes pushed beyond the bounds of logic, that his anti-clericalism was a purely political doctrine and had no anti-religious significance; and it was probably owing more to her urgency than to his favourable estimate of the Pope's accommodating and diplomatic temper that he ever embarked, however tentatively, on his attempt to negotiate with the Vatican the preliminaries to a concordat of separation. No doubt, too, it was from her that he acquired the mellow charm of his later manner, which was exhibited with such effect during his tenure of the Presidency of the Chamber. But whether, in their political discussions, she had the last word is a more doubtful matter. On the evidence available it seems that, while still at the height of his powers, Gambetta did not hesitate to make his will prevail against hers. Later, when his health began to fail and his firmness to leave him, the vacillations of his policy, in his dealings with Bismarck for example, and in his long balance

of his Presidency against his Premiership, suggest a conflict of two wills neither of which can definitely overcome the other. Thereat we must be content to leave it, and until this vital matter is cleared up Gambetta's love story must be treated as part of the postscript to his life. But it was the whole volume of her life. When all was over she entered the death chamber, kissed his forehead and vanished. It was some days before his friends found her and eventually induced her to accept a small annuity. For several years her restless, grief-stricken spirit dragged her from town to town. She spent much time in Rome, seat and centre of her faith, the city which, above all other yet inhabited haunts of men, points the contrast between supreme achievement and tragic nullity which is the crowning paradox of mortal life. In later years she withdrew altogether from the world and gave herself up to devotional works. But to the end she kept by her the most prized of all his gifts except his ring—his photograph with the inscription in his nervous, delicate handwriting :

A LA LUMIÈRE DE MON ÂME, À L'ÉTOILE DE MA VIE.

A LÉONIE LÉON.

SEMPRE ! SEMPRE ! ¹

¹ To the star of my soul, to the light of my life.

To Léonie Léon.

For ever ! For ever !

XXIII

“ LE GRAND MINISTÈRE ”

THE ministry formed by Gambetta in the autumn of 1881 was in its composition the ghost, and in its programme the echo, of the ministry which, but for Thiers' death, he would have formed in the autumn of 1877. The four intervening years had seen great changes in the political situation. The Republic was now free from menace, whether royalist, Bonapartist, or clerical. The 363, who had returned 326 after the elections of 1877, returned 467 after the elections of 1881. From the date of the Republic's constitution the sections of the left had been reluctant to coalesce into a single party except in face of an immediate crisis, and during 1881 the certainty of victory at the coming elections had aggravated the inclination to disunion. Gambetta's remedy for a development so contrary to his ideas was the substitution of the department for the constituency as the electoral unit. With France broken up into 533 separate fragments, every phase of republican thought found independent and disconnected expression. But with the 86 departments of France each voting for its amalgamated list of candidates, the various sections would be conscious that they all sprang from the same popular vote and would automatically cohere. As time went on and the republican disintegration grew more pronounced, Gambetta became obsessed with the notion that salvation could be found in *scrutin de liste*. The thought of it dominated his conduct throughout the last session of the old Chamber, and his insistence on his project in face of a new Chamber itself elected by constituencies brought about the quick downfall of his ministry.

In itself the doctrine was soundly republican, and when departmental election was proposed in 1875 the whole party had voted solidly for it. Since then, however, it had fallen into disfavour with many eminent republicans, Grévy and Ferry among them. There were some who held that the constitu-

tional issue was closed and that revision, even in so wise a direction, had better be postponed. There were others who dreaded the demagogue obtaining a plebiscitary mandate by election in a number of departments and imposing himself on the Constitution as Thiers had imposed himself on the National Assembly. The career of General Boulanger was to show that this apprehension was not baseless, but even in 1881 it was not entertained on merely abstract grounds. There was one man whose unique popularity throughout France would enable him to exploit the most dangerous possibilities of the departmental method ; that man was Gambetta. It is not surprising that his enemies did all they could to convert the question into a personal matter by insisting that the abolition of single-member constituencies was Gambetta's plan for paving the way to a new dictatorship.

A proposal to change the electoral arrangements before the next election was put into a Bill which came up for discussion in May 1881. The reception was at first favourable, but became hostile when Gambetta declared his emphatic support. The Government announced its neutrality, and the fate of the Bill was left in the hands of an excited and suspicious Chamber. Gambetta's intervention was eagerly awaited, and the speech by which he secured a favourable vote was the last of his parliamentary triumphs. He began by a brief and dignified reference to the attacks on himself, which would be ridiculous were they less malignant. To put an end to them and to enable the Bill to be judged on its merits, he publicly declared that he would not himself stand as a candidate in more than one department. While the impression caused by his frankness was still strong, he plunged at once into the most controversial phase of its argument. The National Assembly, which had created the Republic, had voted against *scrutin de liste*. True, but this was only because *scrutin de liste* was then in operation and was alarming the reactionary majority by the zeal and regularity with which it returned republican candidates. Next, the constituency system had not proved fatal to the Republic after 16 May. True, but this was because the 363 had coalesced. Nowhere did republican challenge republican ; in fact, in the elections of 1877 the party had imposed upon the constituencies what was in effect a very comprehensive list. Then Gambetta turned to the right. They had complained that the majority, not content with declaring many of their successes invalid, had

drafted this scheme in order to deprive them of their few remaining seats. On the contrary, if *scrutin de liste* had been in operation in 1877 not one royalist or imperialist would have been unseated. They would have kept their seats, because under the wider system the corruption and intimidation associated with official candidatures would have been impossible and would have failed had it been attempted. The reader of the speech can feel Gambetta gradually gaining the ear of the House, particularly as he pursues his ingenious argument with the right. Sure of his audience at last, he threw dialectics aside and brought the controversy to a higher level. His object, he declared, was to serve France, not to score a parliamentary success. Only by *scrutin de liste* could the Republic rise to the height of its mission. Let deputies think of themselves as they really were, tied to their constituencies, dependent on the whim of the average elector whose vote turned on his member's success in getting a spell of extra leave for his son in the army. Such a condition of affairs made for pettiness in governors and governed alike and created an atmosphere fatal to energetic reform. What, too, of the future? The new social castes whose accession to power he had once proclaimed must be given a fair field. They would not find it in constituencies which, with human nature what it was, always favoured a candidate of wealth and influence. The future was the topic of the effective peroration in which the House was invited to prefer a Republic broad-based, fruitful and progressive, to an uncertain régime for ever vacillating between parties. It was for the former that Gambetta, in a phrase which his enemies took care was never forgotten, declared himself ready to fight to the bitter end.

The French equivalent of the second reading was carried by eight votes only, but the Bill finally passed the House by a majority of sixty-five. A victory, as the Duc de Broglie remarked after the vote which evicted Thiers, always brings its prisoners.

Had Gambetta remained in Paris to watch the progress of the Bill through the Senate it would probably have passed, for the Upper House was not inclined to dispute the Chamber's right to determine the conditions of its own election. Unfortunately, however, Gambetta left the capital to carry out a long-standing engagement. He had promised to unveil a war memorial at Cahors, which he had not visited for ten years. He

was welcomed with true meridional warmth. Nor was the prophet himself insusceptible to the honour paid him in his own country. Though his natural emotion reacted unfavourably on his health, he was punctilious in fulfilling the many engagements made for him, and delighted his fellow-citizens with charming examples of the oratory they had gathered to hear. One speech contained a reference to the political situation. The Senate, he observed, showed every disposition to pass a Bill which would not only assure republican union but would perfect the instrument of universal suffrage. This readiness to respond to popular feeling must be set against the criticisms passed on the Upper House because of its undemocratic character. For himself he was of opinion that the arrangements for constituting the Senate ought to be given a fair trial. The election of 1875 was abnormal. The real quality of the Senate would not appear until the last of the triennial renewals had taken place. In any case it was premature to conclude that the constitution round which republican France had rallied needed to be remodelled. The speech indicated that revision should be postponed till 1885.

It was a tranquillizing declaration, nor was there any episode in the Cahors visit to cause legitimate misgiving. But Gambetta returned to Paris to find the hounds of the press in full cry. Crowds had lined the whole length of the railway from Paris to Cahors. Gambetta had been received with peals of bells and salvoes of artillery. His reference to the respect due to the Head of the State was a piece of insolent patronage. The trip recalled Louis Napoleon's journeys in 1851. By a cruel parody of Gambetta's fondness for classical allusions, his genial days in his own home were represented as his Lupercalia at which Antony, as represented by the prefect of the department, had offered a crown which Cæsar-Gambetta could hardly be said to have refused. The campaign was false and unscrupulous. Thanks, however, to Gambetta's error in using his presidential post as a means to influencing policy it was thoroughly effective.¹ Panic spread in the senatorial lobbies. The Elysée insinuated

¹ Much mischief, too, was done by a misleading report of the language used by Gambetta in private conversation with Girardin. What he had really said was that politicians of national eminence found themselves threatened in their constituencies by rival candidates of merely local importance. To-day it was the doctor; to-morrow it would be the vet.; the day after the vet.'s assistant. This remark was converted into a sneer at the existing Chamber as composed of assistant veterinary surgeons.

that the chosen of *scrutin de liste* would deprive the President of all power and constitute himself master of France. With the proverbial ingratitude of politicians, the senators threw out the Bill by 148 votes to 114.

Gambetta accepted the challenge at once. Early in August he opened his election campaign at a place which surpassed even Cahors in the significance of its associations with himself. In an elaborate speech at Tours he went back on his previous policy and declared that the Senate's behaviour had made constitutional revision inevitable. The two Houses could only co-operate if both were in harmony with the popular will. Urged on by the enemies of universal suffrage, the Senate had committed a blunder whose repetition must be made impossible. First, therefore, the financial powers of the Upper House must be modified so that the last word in money bills should indubitably rest with the Chamber. Next, the seventy-five co-opted life senators must go. Their place should be taken by senators elected for nine years by the National Assembly of the two Houses sitting together. The change would help to create a stable majority which would not be subservient to any Ministry, however strong. A week later Ferry, who was genuinely anxious for the democratic working of the constitution, accepted these proposals, and republican union seemed assured.

The remainder of Gambetta's ministerial programme was developed partly in the Tours speech and partly in an address to his Paris constituents. This last was an elaborate manifesto, prefaced by an enthusiastic defence of opportunism. Gambetta declared that he had adopted it as his policy after the most mature reflection and that it should be approved as the only means of avoiding the alternate bouts of violence and panic which made up so much of French history. A Chamber elected in the proper opportunist spirit would be a powerful and efficient instrument of reform, but would not seek to carry at once in its arms the whole of the materials for the structure of the new France. The various issues must be ranked and numbered according to their importance and urgency. Gambetta gave no clear hint of what the numbering was to be, but touched on all the heads of policy. Military service was to be reduced to three years. A clean sweep would be made of most of the existing exemptions, and the future of long-service non-commissioned officers would be secured by giving them first claim on various appointments in the civil bureaucracy. A thorough-

going reform of the judicial system would reduce both the total number of courts and the number of judges in each, and would thus increase the prestige of the individual judge. Education must be made universal, compulsory, and free, and must be in the hands of lay teachers. Clericalism, though vanquished, was not dead, and the Church must be stripped of the privileges it had been allowed to acquire and brought into strict conformity with the law of the land. An important instrument would be the income-tax, which would extend to the property of religious corporations. It was a tax under which every man would pay according to his capacity, and was thus in full accord with the declaration of the rights of man. In the sphere of social reform, trade unions would be legalized by the grant of complete freedom of association. Finally, France would pursue a pacific but firm and dignified foreign policy, neither holding herself in chilly isolation nor becoming involved in diplomatic intrigues. She would reveal her attitude by seeking friendly understandings with foreign states, particularly in commercial matters.

Gambetta regarded the elections as giving him a mandate for this policy. He indicated his acceptance in a speech of some solemnity, in which he pledged himself to set France above party, and cautioned his fellow-countrymen against reforms which looked well on paper but did not penetrate the fabric of the State. He ended with the suggestion that *scrutin de liste* should be adjourned, either till the new Chamber was nearing the end of its term or until the general revision of the constitution was taken in hand. Only a puerile dogmatism would force another election almost at once by inviting the new Chamber to proclaim the inadequacy of the electoral system out of which it had just been born. It was a sensible proposal, but Gambetta's enemies would have none of it. Now that he was about to assume power, they said, he was shamelessly throwing overboard the very reform for which he had declared himself ready to fight to the bitter end.

Though by no means heedless of the clamour, Gambetta went quietly ahead with his preparations. In September he travelled in Germany, and after his return “The Times” announced that he had visited Friedrichsruhe to assure Bismarck of his pacific intentions. The statement was probably correct, and, in view of the wild comments made upon it, was certainly not contradicted by Gambetta's vague public reference to

press fictions about his German journey.¹ On his return he made a tour in Normandy and delivered speeches on horse-breeding, which showed that he was perhaps not altogether free from the tendency to curry local favour. In addresses to dockers at the ports he somewhat strengthened his scheme of social reform, forecasting an employers' liability Bill and a measure for working-class insurance. Shortly before the new Chamber met he returned to Paris to await the inevitable progress of events. His ministry was casting a very definite shadow before.

Nevertheless his situation was by no means easy. His own election campaign had been unpropitious. The Paris district for which he sat had been divided into two constituencies, and he decided to contest both. The decision was perhaps unwise in view of the plebiscitary aspirations with which he was credited, and his enemies, who were never restrained by scruples, tried to work up feeling against him by insinuations that he was also a candidate elsewhere. A forged election address to a constituency in the Ardennes was actually put into circulation. Still more damage was done by the unsatisfactory result of his candidatures. It became clear that he had lost his former hold upon the capital and this at a time when he was at last about to assume office. A monster meeting was arranged for him. The organization was bad and his opponents mustered in force and wrecked the demonstration. For the first time in his life Gambetta failed to get a hearing. He lost his temper and shouted a few angry words, which the reporters took down. When the votes were counted it was found that he had carried the one constituency by a paltry 1000; in the other, where two candidates were against him, his poll fell short by 50 of the necessary absolute majority. He rightly declined to go to a second ballot in a constituency for which he did not mean to sit, but the impression of weakness which resulted from the polling was most disconcerting.

In the new House, too, his following was inadequate. The "République française" had indeed published an amalgamated list, a revised version of the 363, which included all good republicans, Ferry and his adherents among them. But in

¹ The question will not be finally elucidated until Gambetta's letters to Madame Léon are published in full. It has been the subject of much newspaper discussion, not all illuminating (see "The Times," August 1907). The editors of Bismarck's correspondence admit that Gambetta paid a tourist's visit to Friedrichsruhe, but deny that he was received by the Chancellor.

point of fact true union was barely attained in Paris itself, and the republican majority in the Chamber was clearly divisible into groups. Gambetta's own party was just over 200 strong, an insufficient total in a House of 533, with 90 irreconcilables of the right ready to join a combination against him. The addition of the extreme left would bring his force up to 250, but Gambetta never leaned to co-operation with the extreme left. His prospects turned on the possibility of a coalition with Ferry, whose group, the republican left, numbered 168. But the terms were likely to be hard. If Ferry could secure the 34 votes of the left centre his voting strength would equal Gambetta's own.

When the new Parliament met, Ferry behaved loyally. Holding that the elections had given Gambetta a mandate to form a ministry, he declared his intention of resigning at once. But he was responsible for the Tunisian policy which had excited so much public comment, and it was only right that the discussion should take place while he was still in office. The turn of the debate showed that the expedition was thoroughly unpopular. Opinion was nervous and opposed to anything which savoured of adventure. The Chamber was reluctant to believe that the operations had indeed been crowned with the complete success claimed by the Government. By the rules of French parliamentary procedure it was necessary for the debate to be concluded by a motion. Ferry demanded a colourless resolution which would leave his successor's hands entirely free. Gambetta, who in anticipation of his summons to office had declined to stand again for the Presidency of the Chamber, voted for this motion and left the House. But the proposal was negatived. The Chamber did not know its own mind. On the one hand it was inclined to censure Ferry; on the other hand it wanted a Gambetta ministry and therefore would not express views on Tunisian policy which Gambetta himself could not support. Motion after motion was brought forward and rejected. Meanwhile Gambetta sat in the lobbies anxiously considering the future. He was naturally reluctant to declare himself on Tunis until he had discussed his policy with his projected colleagues; he was equally reluctant to allow the new Chamber to lose prestige by exhibiting incompetence in the opening days of its first session. At last he did the honourable thing. He went to the tribune and moved a resolution to the effect that the treaty of the previous May must be strictly

observed. The House rallied to the definite lead and carried the motion. Only 68 members opposed it, but it must have disquieted Gambetta to observe that nearly 200 abstained from voting. Nevertheless he promptly accepted the President's commission to form a ministry.

Gambetta's Cabinet is often called the *Grand Ministère*. The epithet is used in irony. A *grand ministère* would include all the leaders of the republican party. Such a ministry of true republican concentration is often forecasted in French politics, but has only once been found practicable. The Cabinet formed by M. Poincaré after the terms of M. Caillaux' treaty with the Germans over Morocco had sent a wave of patriotic indignation over France was indeed a *grand ministère*, and was the fulfilment of the aspiration which Gambetta bequeathed to French statesmen. The ministry which Gambetta had hoped to form would have included M. Léon Say, the President of the Senate, M. Henri Brisson, the President of the Chamber, and MM. Ferry and Freycinet, both ex-Premiers. It was Gambetta's intention to take no portfolio himself, thus emphasizing the importance of the Premiership and incidentally excluding the President of the Republic from the chair at Cabinet meetings. He first approached M. Say and offered him his old post of Finance Minister. But M. Say was full of misgivings as to the financial consequences of the Freycinet railway programme to which Gambetta had induced him to agree. He now demanded that there should be no more loans and definitely refused to consider any project for State railway purchase. Gambetta insisted that at the very least State purchase must be maintained as a possibility in view of the coming negotiations with the railway companies. M. Say was firm and declined office. Gambetta next turned to Freycinet. In earlier conversations with his old colleague he had offered him the portfolio of War Minister and Freycinet had expressed his readiness to accept it. But M. Say's refusal to assume office disorganized the old plans, and Gambetta now invited Freycinet to become Minister of Foreign Affairs, while intimating that he would himself direct the Cabinet's external policy. It was, in fact, to be a renewal of the old Tours partnership. But in those days Freycinet had been styled a delegate; now he was to be called minister but was to exercise less than ministerial power. Besides, he disagreed with his chief about Egypt. After a day's hesitation he declined to enter the Cabinet. These two refusals put it out

of the question for Gambetta to approach either Ferry or Brisson. Ferry had just been the object of what was tantamount to censure on the part of the Chamber. It might have been possible to find room for him in a Cabinet thoroughly representative of every section of republican opinion. It was not possible to give him a post in a Cabinet in which he would be the only politician of the first rank apart from Gambetta himself. His exclusion shut out Brisson. Brisson was in favour of a more thorough-going constitutional revision than Gambetta would sanction, but might have given way for the sake of party unity had he learned that Ferry had yielded on the question of *scrutin de liste*.

Gambetta was thus thrown back on the members of his own group, only to find that he could not rely upon the most conspicuous figure among them. Challemel-Lacour, at that time Ambassador in London, declined the portfolio of Foreign Affairs. He was in gloomy mood, and expressed a wish to be relieved of his Embassy so that he could retire from public life altogether. In the end Gambetta was forced to choose his colleagues mainly from the younger men of his party, a fact which gave a dictatorial air to his own position. He took the Foreign Office himself along with the Premiership, appointing Reinach as Secretary to the Cabinet and Spuller as his Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs. Among the other members of the Government were three men hitherto obscure who were destined to leave some mark on the history of France. M. Félix Faure, a future President of the Republic, was one of the under-secretaries. M. Rouvier, a future Prime Minister, whose subsequent career was, however, scarcely worthy of his abilities, combined the portfolios of Commerce and the Colonies. The junction of these two offices was itself an indication of policy. Gambetta first discerned the economic importance of tropical possessions, and the new direction which he gave to the colonial administration of France may be said to have heralded the partition of Africa. The Ministry of the Interior was entrusted to M. Waldeck Rousseau, a young and enthusiastic disciple who inherited a double portion of his master's spirit. It was he who twenty years later brought the Republic safely through the agony of the Dreyfus affair. One other member of the Cabinet would surely have been prominent in later French politics had he not been removed by a premature death. M. Paul Bert became Minister of Education and of Public Worship, another signifi-

cant combination over which Grévy chuckled grimly when the new list of ministers was submitted to him. Besides approving the names, the President signed decrees elevating to the rank of ministries the departments of Agriculture and Fine Arts, which had previously been in charge of under-secretaries. The importance of French agriculture and the fact that the country was suffering from the effects of bad harvests justified the more vigorous intervention of the Government in the rural life of France. The Ministry of Fine Arts was created in accordance with a parallel plan for bringing the administration into closer touch with town life, and was intended to become the means of linking French taste with French industry.

There was precedent for creating new ministries by decree, but the Chamber made considerable pother over the affair. M. Ribot laid the foundations of his fame by a powerful speech, in which he insisted that since sovereignty belonged to the legislature, not to the executive, the House ought to have been invited to sanction the principle of the change. It was not enough that it should express retrospective approval by voting the necessary credits. M. Ribot scored a damaging point by observing that Gambetta's method of executive action had also been practised by Bismarck. There was substance, too, in his general criticism. Gambetta's notion that it was the duty of a Government to give a definite lead to the Chamber conflicted with that body's own conception of parliamentary supremacy. It was precisely on this issue that the ministry was eventually overturned. But for the moment Gambetta was safe. An attempt was indeed made, so soon as the ministry was formed, to challenge its right to lay down the programme of constitutional revision to be carried through by the two Houses sitting jointly as a National Assembly. But the time had not yet come for this issue to be fought out ; the Christmas recess was near, and Gambetta postponed the introduction of his proposals until after the adjournment.

Meanwhile the energetic temper of the Cabinet began to reveal itself in new official appointments. Great changes were made at the War Office. Of the men whom Gambetta had contemplated as his colleagues in the shadow-Cabinet of 1877, the War Minister, General Campenon, was alone available in 1881. The General was a sturdy republican who had paid for his opinions under the Empire by long terms of service in remote and disagreeable African stations. So far from bearing malice,

he set himself to show that under the Republic a soldier's political opinions were of no moment provided that he was willing to render loyal service. On his advice Gambetta appointed General Miribel chief of the general staff. On its merits the appointment was absolutely sound. General Miribel had drawn up the scheme for the general mobilization of the new national army, and had indeed already once occupied the post to which he was now summoned. But he had been appointed by MacMahon in the worst days after 16 May, when a military *coup d'état* had appeared imminent. It is not surprising that good republicans rubbed their eyes when they read of the nomination. A batch of appointments to the Army Council was made with similar disregard to political ties. The weight of the names went far towards stifling criticism, though one outspoken deputy declared that there was not a general among them who would not have shot Gambetta at sight during the Commune.

New blood was also introduced into the Foreign Office by the appointment of M. Weiss to the important post of political director. M. Weiss was a publicist of distinction, but he, too, had a past. He had deplored the attitude of the previous Chamber in refusing to vote supplies until MacMahon had given way or given up. Such action, he contended, set party above patriotism. He had no special qualification for his new post, and the appointment gave the greater offence because he had become one of Gambetta's most devoted admirers, and had found in the wonderful career of the Cahors grocer's son the realization of his youthful romantic dreams in the far-off days when Louis Philippe was king.

Gambetta justified these two appointments, which one newspaper genially attributed to delirium tremens, by the epigrammatic remark that government went by parties and administration by brains. The doctrine was true, but its application was unhappy. Were there not sufficient brains in the republican party to which the vast majority of deputies and citizens belonged? In Paris the names Weiss and Miribel became a sort of password among Gambetta's opponents. But their cup was not yet full. With his chief's approval, M. Waldeck Rousseau sent out to the departmental prefects a circular which shocked the lobbies. The Minister of the Interior announced that he would henceforth ignore the recommendations and appeals of deputies on behalf of their constituents, and would make

appointments on the advice of his prefects. The prefects were urged in their turn to become acquainted with every phase of departmental life. Frequent visits to Paris were deprecated as tending to interrupt their local work. The circular was an attempt to enact by administrative fiat the benefits which Gambetta anticipated from the system of departmental election. Gambetta had now decided on his method of dealing with this difficult item of policy. He proposed to embody it in the constitution as revised by the National Assembly. But, enacted in this way, the change would not become operative for four years. Meanwhile the members of the Chamber would be forced to act in its spirit, and would thus be able to cope with the great programme of constructive reform forecasted by the Government.

Neither revision nor reform could be undertaken, however, until the Tunisian question had been got out of the way. Its settlement was the one solid achievement of Gambetta's administration. Gambetta's authority induced the reluctant Chamber to sanction the whole of Ferry's policy. Greater difficulty was to be apprehended in the Senate, where the opposition was led by his old rival the Duc de Broglie. But Gambetta was in his most genial and persuasive mood. Challenged to say whether he meant to annex or to evacuate, he replied that his intention was to do neither, but to protect according to the terms of the treaty. He even established a parallel, on which history has made its own ironical comment, between his plans for Tunis and the settlement which Mr Gladstone was just making in the Transvaal. But the argument served its purpose, and the protectorate of Tunis was established beyond challenge. It was a real success, and the Christmas adjournment saw the ministry safely past the first lions in its path. It was further encouraged by the elections at the turn of the year for the renewal of a third of the Senate. A clear majority of the successful candidates were prepared to accept the Tours programme of revision.

During the recess Gambetta addressed himself to another Mediterranean issue. The situation in Egypt was causing anxiety. The country was under the joint financial tutelage of France and Britain, but the arrangement was threatened by a nationalist agitation. Gambetta attached the utmost importance to co-operation with Britain in colonial matters, and sought to pivot his policy on the maintenance of the dual control in

Egypt. In England the will of the nation had recently drawn Mr Gladstone out of his semi-retirement. Mr Gladstone's remarkable hold on British opinion was due to the fulness and variety of his response to the instincts of contemporary liberalism. It was a simple creed, holding that all questions could be solved by strict attention to business and the resolute application of principles. At the moment Mr Gladstone could discover no principle to apply in Egypt. He therefore intimated that while he was willing to talk with France he would not commit himself to acting with her. Making the most of the concession, Gambetta secured the dispatch of a joint note which offered the Khedive some prospect of Franco-British support against the nationalists. The note was in advance of French opinion, still timorous of oversea commitments and inclined to withdraw from the Egyptian complication if satisfactory financial guarantees could be obtained. Bismarck, who viewed with disfavour any step calculated to lessen the isolation of France, adroitly intervened. At his instigation the other Great Powers protested against any change in the status of Egypt without their consent. France took alarm, and when, a few months later, the outbreak at Alexandria gave Mr Gladstone a principle on which to act, the French Government left him to act alone.

Thanks to Bismarck, suspicion was already attaching to Gambetta's foreign policy when the Chamber reassembled in January. But his domestic policy would in any case have sufficed for his undoing. Ministers had worked hard during the recess and had ready for submission to Parliament fifteen Bills which covered all the items of the programme laid down by Gambetta during the election campaign. These measures, the full texts of which have been rescued from oblivion by M. Reinach, formed a legislative mine from which many subsequent French Cabinets were to extract nuggets. But Gambetta's voice was never heard in support of his plans. Before the reforms could be considered the constitution was to be revised, and the opposition, already furious at M. Waldeck Rousseau's circular, set themselves to scotch proposals which disturbed every vested interest and threatened every sinecure in France, by defeating the preliminary scheme.

Its weak point was conspicuous. Gambetta proposed to limit revision to the enactment of *scrutin de liste* and to the changes in the composition and powers of the Senate which he

had demanded in his Tours speech. Immediately on the formation of his ministry he had rejected a demand of the extreme left for unqualified revision on the ground that such revision was intended to mean the establishment of single-chamber Government and that the country was in no mood for constitutional adventures. To this argument M. Clemenceau had raised a most important objection. The National Assembly, he declared, was sovereign, and the Government of the day had no right to attempt to limit its authority. The line of attack indicated by M. Clemenceau was further pursued by members of the committee to which Gambetta's Bill was referred. Suppose, Gambetta was asked, that the Bill becomes law, that the National Assembly meets under its provisions, and that when in session it declares its intention to revise other items of the constitution; what then? Then, replied Gambetta, the National Assembly would be breaking the law, and the President of the Republic, as guardian of the law, would proceed against it. The further point was taken that, as the President was constitutionally irresponsible, a ministry would have to accept responsibility for his acts. Gambetta agreed, and added that ministers would not fail in their duty. His words were interpreted as implying that he was prepared to assert his own authority over the National Assembly, and that France was therefore already under a dictatorship. Put in this extreme form, the case against Gambetta's plan became ridiculous, and M. Clemenceau rightly shrugged his shoulders over the behaviour of his colleagues. But there was a truth behind their gross exaggeration—a truth obscured by the emphasis with which French publicists of the republican school maintain that Gambetta was forced out of office by the intrigues of unscrupulous opponents. That personal animus helped to form the coalition against Gambetta is beyond doubt; but the members of the moderate left whose adverse votes turned the scale against the ministry were performing what they took to be their public duty. Their view, which might well have been upheld by the French supreme court, had the constitution of the Third Republic followed the American model and referred such points to its decision, was that Gambetta's Revision Bill was flagrantly unconstitutional.

The root of the trouble lay in the deliberate vagueness of the original revisionary clause of 1875. What the majority of the right in the National Assembly had meant by revision was a

monarchical restoration after the Comte de Chambord's death. But it was inexpedient to declare this meaning in so many words, and it was accordingly enacted that the constitution should be revised by the two Houses sitting together as a National Assembly, each House having first agreed to the joint session. The defect of this arrangement was that no line had been drawn between constitutional revision and ordinary legislation. Frenchmen themselves failed to appreciate the distinction. Only an accident had prevented the passage into law by Bill of *scrutin de liste*, which Gambetta now proposed to fix in the constitution by a vote of the National Assembly. But Gambetta's Revision Bill went much further than the defeated *scrutin de liste* Bill of the previous session. It enumerated the paragraphs of the constitution which the National Assembly was to revise, and thus limited the powers of that body by the very resolution which was to call it into existence. The authors of the constitution, on the other hand, had undoubtedly intended the National Assembly to be sovereign; nor could French thought readily conceive of a body which though not sovereign was nevertheless constituent.

Gambetta's proposal thus appeared as an infraction on the part of the executive on the authority of a supreme Parliament. Gambetta had two answers to this criticism. The first was that as the ministry would still exist even when the National Assembly was in session, it was its duty to lead the amalgamated House and to submit a definite programme of revision. The second, developed with great force in his speech in the final debate which ended in the fall of the Government, was that ultimate sovereignty rested with the people. As the creation of universal suffrage, the National Assembly had no right or duty except to act in accordance with the popular will. But in the matter of constitutional revision the popular will had been indubitably manifested. Gambetta had laid his programme before the nation in his speech at Tours and the electorate had endorsed it. Both these points were sound. The National Assembly had no mandate to go beyond the Tours programme, and it would naturally look to the Cabinet to throw into appropriate legal form the constitutional amendments sanctioned at the polls. But both arguments missed the main practical point. Gambetta was not guiding the work of the National Assembly; on the contrary, he was seeking, by legislative enactment, to impose guidance on it before it met and to deprive it in advance

of its mastery of its own actions. This illogical line was forced on him by circumstances. His scheme required the existence in each House of a majority in harmony with the Government and willing to follow its lead. Gambetta had no assurance of such a majority, but was not prepared to risk calling the National Assembly into existence without it. He therefore proposed to create it by passing a sort of pilot Bill. The procedure savoured of a constitutional trick, and was bound to shock the French mind with its clear grasp of principle and its instinct for the precise location of sovereign authority. It seemed to the opposition that Gambetta intended to leave the last word with the Government; the constitution, on the contrary, left the last word with the National Assembly; and this arrangement, so clearly in accordance with the traditions of the Revolution, could not be suffered to be impaired.

The committee to which Gambetta's Bill was referred framed an ingenious resolution to suit these views. Gambetta's project of partial revision was approved, but the right of the National Assembly to undertake unlimited revision was asserted. When the motion came before the Chamber, Gambetta demanded the excision of this latter clause. His speech was long and in parts a little rambling, but was distinguished by a sombre majesty. It was a call to France, over the heads of members whose interruptions Gambetta announced his intention of ignoring. It exalted the authority of universal suffrage, of which Gambetta was the servant and interpreter and could never claim to be the master. With bitter indignation he rebutted the charges that he was himself stooping to that very method of tyranny by plebiscite of which his whole career had been one long denunciation. He closed with an appeal for confidence. He could not believe that the republican army with which he had faced so many struggles and endured so many trials would reject his leadership in the hour of victory. But if confidence were refused him he would bow to the verdict without a shade of wounded personal feeling. "For whatever may be said of me, there is something which I set above all ambitions, however honourable, and that is the goodwill of republicans, without which I could not accomplish what I am entitled to call my mission—the regeneration of France." The appeal failed. Gambetta, beaten by 45 votes, resigned that night. Like the true patriot that he was, he thought only of France. His last official word with the President was to

entreat him—vainly—to keep Miribel. His ministry had lasted seventy-three days (15 November 1881–26 January 1882).

In accordance with the plans of the Elysée, Freycinet at once formed a Cabinet which included Ferry and Léon Say. But the new Government was made impotent by the dissensions between its leading members, and French politics gradually lapsed into the state of garrulous torpor which was to give Boulangism its opportunity.

XXIV

FRANCE AND GAMBETTA

ON the day that he presented his ministry to Parliament, Gambetta told a friend that he was in office for three months or three years. In the event the lower estimate proved too high by nearly three weeks, and it may be doubted whether he himself considered his higher time limit adequate for the passage of his vast programme of legislation. It may even be questioned whether the programme was seriously meant. His colleagues were able and vigorous men, but they were inexperienced and dependent on himself for inspiration. In spite of his need of all his energies for the general direction of his ministry he had taken over the heavy burden of the Foreign Office. Moreover, his energies were palpably failing. "I feel as strong as I did fifteen years ago," he wrote to his father on the eve of his election to the Presidency of the Chamber. A year later he had a different tale to tell. "I am thoroughly worn out in body and mind. My bronchitis has returned worse than ever, and I am forced to stay in one room." Once more his vigour threw off his malady, but in 1881 the strain of public speaking was manifestly becoming too great for him. But his pluck was indomitable. His original plan of holding office for a few months in which to unite his party and launch his programme, and then retiring in Freycinet's favour, was wrecked by Freycinet's refusal to co-operate. Yet, in spite of his initial disappointments, he formed a ministry; to decline the President's commission would have been to place himself in the melancholy rank of politicians with brilliant futures behind them. His sense of public duty and his confidence in his hold on France made him scout the idea of failure. When he took office it was with the genuine intention of somehow performing the work that lay in front of him. But experience soon taught him that success was impossible, and the great collection of Bills which he tabled after the Christmas adjournment was in the nature of

a demonstration. His attitude is revealed in a note to his father written during the recess: "I trust in history, and when it is from history alone that a man can hope for justice, slander and calumny pass over his head without touching him." As he put it to Madame Léon, he was fighting his last good fight and meant to tell the country the truth; the tone of his speech before the fatal division was that of a farewell message. "I do not complain," he wrote when all was over. "I foresee that in a few years' time the country will be enlightened and will then revert to its traditions and will do what is just."

This sense that his work was passing into history had been growing on him of recent years. In a speech to which most of his biographers call attention he had hinted the possibility of his early death. In 1878 he had sanctioned the publication of a complete and authoritative collection of his speeches with explanatory notes. The task had originally been assigned to Spuller, but Spuller was now in Parliament and busy with politics, and M. Reinach was appointed editor in his place. The first volumes appeared before Gambetta's death; the last—there are eleven in all—was published in 1885. M. Reinach has also collected in two large volumes the papers of Gambetta's period of office in the Government of National Defence. The whole work has been perfectly done, and has rendered any official biography superfluous. The tale of Gambetta's life is told in his own words. M. Reinach himself observes that the speeches are an education in general politics and parliamentary tactics. They also contain some of the most splendid examples of oratory in French literature, and from first to last are animated by a most sincere and glowing patriotism which makes them an education not only in politics but in public duty.

The last volume contains, besides some examples of Gambetta's early journalism, the three speeches which he delivered after his resignation. The closing months of his life were not spent in idleness, and while he lay dying he talked of delivering a good-tempered speech which would reconcile the Chamber. Throughout the spring and summer he still came regularly to the office of the "*République française*," where he had resumed his work of instructing opinion, and often dictated articles while suffering intense pain. He was less frequent in his attendance at the House, however, and, as strength and spirits gradually failed, withdrew more and more to his little home at Ville d'Avray, where, with his dear wife beside him, he welcomed

his chosen friends and through them maintained unbroken touch with affairs. His serenity was undimmed. "All this turmoil, all these presumptuous chatter-boxes, will be silenced," he wrote to a political friend, "when once the nation, with its habitual good sense, gets the upper hand. Then the real republican France will have her day" (25 Sept. 1882).

In May he attended a function which must have given him special pleasure. During his short Premiership he had made the first appointment to the Legion of Honour of a member of one of the new social castes—an engine-driver whose presence of mind had averted a terrible accident. His fellow workers gave him a dinner, with Victor Hugo in the chair and Gambetta as the principal speaker. The speech was a declaration of the old democratic faith, undimmed by political accidents and newspaper calumnies. Gambetta still upheld the alliance of bourgeoisie and proletariat, but it must be an alliance in which both parties enjoyed equal rights, and he therefore pressed for the removal of all restrictions on the activities of trade unions.

During the session his voice was twice heard in the Chamber. On June 1 Freycinet declared that the Government was opposed to any military intervention in Egypt, and Gambetta condemned the declaration in a few sentences of fiery protest. Six weeks later the consequences of the Government's policy had become apparent. There had been an outbreak at Alexandria. British ships bombarded the forts, but the French Admiral, in accordance with his instructions, sailed out of the roadstead the moment the British opened fire. Gambetta's last public speech was made at the cost of his last private sacrifice. He tore himself from his mother's death-bed to deliver it. Very solemnly he dwelt on the pitiful results of a policy of cowardice—French interests in Egypt abandoned, the French position in the Levant compromised, the French name sullied by withdrawal in face of anarchy, the understanding with England put in jeopardy. The gloomy, sorrowful speech was lit by one flash of passion. Summoning up his old energies Gambetta, implored the House never to break with the English alliance. To the last he was the apostle of the future, and the speech had about it the authentic ring of prophecy. It wrecked the ministry, but came too late to alter the course of events.

Throughout the summer and autumn Gambetta persevered with his duties as President of the Commission which was

examining the army estimates, but his colleagues were most painfully impressed by his growing physical weakness. On the morning of 27 November he received a visit from his old friend Thoumas, with whom he discussed military matters. Their business concluded, Thoumas was invited to stay to lunch, but declined owing to another engagement. His departure left his host with half an hour on his hands. Ever since his Tours days Gambetta had been keenly interested in the development of weapons of precision. He now went upstairs to the room in which he kept his little armoury and began to examine a new revolver—it hangs on the wall to this day—which a firm of Paris gunsmiths had just sent him. It so happened that the soldier-servant whom Gambetta had employed since 1870 had recently left to get married, and his successor was not yet familiar with his master's ways. On picking up the revolver Gambetta observed that a cartridge was in one of the chambers, and sought to dislodge it. The weapon was of a type then new, and the slight pressure which Gambetta exerted sufficed to fire the shot. The bullet entered the palm of the left hand, near the ball of the thumb, and emerged at the back of the wrist. The wound, though serious, was not dangerous, but the doctor in attendance insisted on special precautions owing to the unsatisfactory state of the patient's general health. For a time all went well. The wound healed, and on 15 December Gambetta was able to take a short walk. Two days later, however, internal inflammation developed. An operation was considered on the 20th, but the doctors hesitated, and within a few days the progress of alarming symptoms prohibited recourse to surgery. The organs of the body gradually ceased to function, and Gambetta died with the dying year.

Calumny had raged about his death-bed, but in the moment of his death France realized him for what he was. A state funeral was decreed and accepted, though his friends decided that his heart should remain in the little house where he had found the happiness which consoled him for all the disappointments of his later days. The coffin was displayed in state, first at Les Jardies and then at his old official residence in Paris. A deputation from Alsace-Lorraine watched beside it on the night before the funeral, and on 7 January an imposing procession followed the bier to Père Lachaise. Every town in France had sent its delegates, and the representatives of Metz and Strasbourg marched at the head of their line. The winter

afternoon had worn away before the last speech was delivered, and the coffin was lowered into the grave by torch-light. Earth from Lorraine was scattered upon it—the last gift of Metz to her deputy.

The grave was not filled in. The grim old father would not suffer France to retain the custody in death of the statesman to whom she had not shown due honour in life, and in the following week the coffin was placed in the family vault at Nice. But the old man's heart softened in time, and before his death he sanctioned an eventual transfer of his son's body to the Panthéon.

But France has found a better way. Gambetta's body still lies beside the remains of his parents in the cemetery at Nice—ground which affords him a fitting resting-place, since it was once Italian and has become part of France. It is his heart that has been taken to the Panthéon. When the republic reached its jubilee it had at last fulfilled the mission with which Gambetta had charged it on the morrow of disaster. To mark the intimate connection of events the date of the celebration was postponed from 4 September until 11 November. On that day France claimed the heart of Gambetta for her own.

Appendices

APPENDIX I

GAMBETTA'S EVIDENCE IN CHIEF BEFORE THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO THE ACTIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENCE

"MY first duty is to explain to the Commission my general attitude in appearing to give evidence before it. By so doing I shall, I hope, save its time as well as my own.

The attitude in which I tender my evidence is this :—In view of all that has been done and all that has happened, in view of the investigation the Committee is conducting, and in view of the mass of evidence and papers by which it is surrounded, it appears to me that my personal position makes it appropriate that my evidence should expound the principles which determined my action before, during and after the revolution of 4 September in regard both to domestic and to external policy. By this I mean the administration and conduct of affairs on the one hand and the prosecution of the war on the other. To go further and to enter into the details of my course of action would be out of the question for various reasons, and particularly for a reason which I may describe as official. Under my direction a mass of decisions was reached as fast as minds could think, and it is impossible for me to discuss them separately with the Committee. Further, it was not my business to examine this or that point of detail. I gave orders which were carried out; the responsibility for giving them necessarily attached to my office.

I have to pass the following remarks on my principles of action in domestic and external policy :—I foresaw the war well before 4 September. I foresaw it with apprehension, as I was most uneasy about the condition of our armaments. I was never among those who attacked standing armies, and was as eager as any man to see France resume her position in Europe, but I was thoroughly alarmed, because politics had converted our army into a hollow affair which might fail us in our time of need.

I feared that the plebiscite would result in war. The plebiscite was the cause of all our troubles. When it was discussed in Parliament I made a speech setting out my views. I said that to grant the executive control over peace and war was to rush on war. When war broke out I was certain that it would end in disaster. My words were: 'Though France has not guessed it, we are rushing blindly towards the abyss.' Accordingly I was by no means pleased to see the party to

which I have the honour to belong succeed to such a state of affairs. I was suspicious of the legacy bequeathed to it. I make this point so that the Committee may appreciate the part I played on 4 September.

In Parliament I exerted myself to create, and almost succeeded in creating, a national Government with no specific label which would take over affairs in the moment of defeat, for I prophesied defeat a fortnight or three weeks before it became manifest. But Parliament, owing to its unfortunate origin and from lack of self-respect and vigour, vacillated and fumbled and allowed itself to be brought to the edge of the precipice. During twenty-four hours I used every effort to induce it to declare that the dynasty was deposed and that a parliamentary Cabinet had been appointed to handle the situation. The plan failed, because I had to deal with pusillanimous and dilatory spirits. A movement then developed of its own accord among the people of Paris. I say 'of its own accord,' but as a matter of fact—and it is a fact which should be stated—revolutions are not made to order. An order can produce an agitation, a scuffle or a riot, but this sort of thing always fails. Under the Empire I was a witness of many alleged conspiracies to alter the system of government. One and all collapsed before my eyes. They were abortive because opinion was not behind them. On the 4th of September, however, I saw a spontaneous upheaval both in Paris and outside Paris. It may be described as a national movement, because Parliament was still sitting and had not reached any decision on the events of the day, when we received telegrams announcing that the Republic had been proclaimed in the Departments. In no way whatever were the events of 4 September the consequence of plans laid beforehand. In fact, I doubt whether a great revolutionary movement ever commanded such general agreement or, I must add, such general respect. I saw the leading associates and servants of the Empire during the day. It was certainly within their power to put up some show of resistance. But without exception they were thinking of resigning and of saving their skins. Feeling flowed in an irresistible tide which every section of the people of Paris helped to swell.

The Republic once proclaimed, the question of the next step naturally arose. I must explain that men's minds were still possessed by the idea which had brought about the revolution of 4 September. There was but one thought—the defence of Paris. Everything except Paris was shut out, and I was myself of opinion that the rest of France was rather overlooked. The view—assuredly an extreme view—was generally entertained that Paris of itself would have the strength not only to ensure its own safety but to drive out the invader. Accordingly there was a universal demand for defensive measures—a fact which accounts for the admission of General Trochu into the Government. We called on him partly on account of his immense popularity with the people of Paris and partly on account of our engrossing thought—the armed defence of the capital. In fact, from the very first the Government presented itself as a military Government. But, further, before conducting, or rather before continuing to conduct, the war, it wished to ascertain how it stood towards the situation created for it by the enemy. Hence M. Favre's visit to Ferrières. We then found

ourselves confronted with the melancholy truth, which I must admit I had never suspected, although I was well aware that the Prussians are the most brutal people in Europe. They pursue their policy in a temper which nothing can disturb and with a persistence which nothing can arrest. They held the advantage, and wished to secure themselves against a reversal of fortune by dismembering France and annexing provinces alleged to be German.

Such was the issue of the interview at Ferrières. M. Jules Favre returned empty-handed. You are acquainted with the report which he submitted to the Government of National Defence on his return. On the day that the siege began Paris was ready. Ever since 4 September she had given her every moment to her military equipment.

We had resolved to summon a constituent Assembly. But with Paris threatened and blockaded, and with Herr von Bismarck proposing outrageous peace terms, the word was 'to arms!' No other course was open. We therefore thought no more of our decree of summons to the electors, and set ourselves to fight. I was of opinion that it would not be possible for Paris to fight to advantage unless the provinces joined her. Every day I heard it said in Cabinet that a relieving army was wanted, and I could not discover the quarter from which such an army might appear.

From the first I had pressed for the departure of the whole Government from Paris. I could not understand how a city reduced by investment and siege to a position of merely strategic importance could remain the seat of Government. I urged that at the very least the Ministries of Finance, of the Interior, and of War, and particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, should leave Paris and form a Government in the country. I believe that of all possible weaknesses this was the worst, and I am positive that events would have fallen out very differently if the Government, instead of being besieged, had been outside Paris and able to act freely.

A delegation was sent into the country to do duty for the Government, and we learned quite unofficially that it was about to hold the elections which we had postponed. This decision, taken without our advice, caused consternation in the Cabinet, and we resolved on the immediate despatch to Tours of an Order prohibiting the elections. This Order was drawn up, and is now in my possession; part of its text has been published. The difficulty was to ensure the arrival of the document. I was asked whether as Minister of the Interior I had any means of despatching it to the country. At this time I had already sent a good many messengers out of Paris. They were all caught and the despatches they carried were published in the German press, where I read them in due course. Herr von Bismarck's police did their work admirably.

I then reverted to my old idea of going into the country and attempting to organise resistance. Personally I was positive, as I am still, that France disposed of gigantic resources, both moral and material. The thunderbolt which had fallen at Sedan was well contrived to fill her with alarm, but lacked power to leave her altogether broken. I said to my colleagues, 'I will undertake to convey this Order into the

country, but I want to make the object of our journey clear to you.' My plan was sanctioned, and I left. *In a balloon, Sept.*

I reached the country. My aim and leading ideas remained unaltered. I intended, so far as was in my power, to maintain order in France without infringing the freedom of the individual citizen. But first and foremost I intended to prosecute the war.

I must admit that when I established myself at Tours I found the country on the point of breaking up. In the south, south-west and west extraordinary symptoms had appeared which menaced the unity of France. Moreover, my forecast had been justified. The Government was weak in action and commanded little respect. I think it has been generally appreciated that the members of the delegation looked to elections as providing a means of mastering a situation which they regarded as serious. They had come to their conclusion in spite of instructions from the Government in Paris, and in spite of decisions in which they had themselves concurred at the Hôtel de Ville.

I joined the Tours delegation with a firm resolve to restore public order, which was in jeopardy in many parts of France. Fortunately a brief interval, fifteen or eighteen days, sufficed to re-establish order everywhere and to secure the release of adherents of the Empire who had been thrown into prison. Their detention was due to the overwhelming popular excitement, inevitable in such a crisis, but when once a proper Government had been established it was out of the question for them to be kept in custody any longer.

I need not dwell upon my actions, whether at Marseilles, at St Etienne, at Lyons, or at Toulouse. All I need point out is that in a very short time the authority of the Government was admitted, respected and obeyed everywhere; that plans for secession collapsed; and that there was no further talk of local leagues in the south or elsewhere. Complete public order was thenceforth maintained until the date of my resignation—30 January.

The unity of France once assured, my sole thought was to call to arms every man of good courage and good will, without distinction of party or views or previous political conduct—every man, in fact, who could claim to share in the defence of his country as a matter of right and without investigation of his opinions and their motives. Thus it came about that side by side with revolutionary enthusiasts there were found the most authoritative members of the royalist party. I treated them with special attention and regard. I did not even shrink from using men who had ties with the Empire, provided I was certain of their courage and good faith.

We got together an army—several armies. Abuse has been showered on them, but tremendous efforts were made, and I can speak of them without vanity, since they were the issue of the whole country's work. I am very far indeed from sharing the view of those who degrade us in our own eyes as well as before the world by declaring that France was in such a state of moral and material decay that she failed in her duty. On the contrary, the nation gave everything—men and money without stint; the troops fought as well as untrained men could fight, considering that there were few officers to lead them and that it

was so hard to recruit more. In this aspect the campaign accomplished all that was possible. No people in Europe, no people in the world, would have been capable of like exertions, particularly when it had been systematically discouraged from undergoing military training and when its standing army, which it had been taught for half a century to regard as the guarantee of its safety, was, every man of it, in the enemy's hands.

I am sure that these exertions, in which members of every party joined and to which all France devoted herself with ever-increasing zeal, would have prevailed in the end through mere persistence and the lapse of time. At their cost we could have preserved what mattered most—the unity of France. This assurance is not mine alone. At this very hour there are people propounding, admitting, publishing, these very arguments—I mean the Germans. Proof could be gathered in a few days from German appreciations of the campaign. Their studies and commentaries show that the prolongation of the strain was what they feared most. They were fully aware that they had reached the limit of their military resources and that exhaustion was imminent.

This was, and is, my ground for maintaining that we should have held out. My justification is that France, utterly surprised and utterly unarmed though she was, yet managed within four months to put 800,000 men into the field. . . .

Well, it is over now. Unhappily the victory was not ours. I will not press a point which would make me seem to be advancing a personal plea. I only wish to exhibit the ideals and policies which determined my action and which upheld me during my day-long and night-long efforts in a cause which I believed, and still believe, would ensure the salvation of my country.

These, then, are the two considerations which influenced me as an individual after what occurred on 4 September. First, I held that in its revolutionary phase, and even when under the enemy's fire, it was the Government's duty to act without recourse to violence, without breach of law, without abuse of authority. Secondly, I held that the war must take precedence of everything and that every moment spared from the thought of defence was a moment put to positively criminal use.

What more is there for me to submit to the Commission? I am aware, of course, that very strong objection has been taken to certain decisions of mine—decisions which have been regarded, not unreasonably, as the crown of my ministerial career. They have been so much discussed that I shall only anticipate the Commission's questions if I deal with them at once. Two offences are specially laid to my charge: first, that in agreement with my fellow-delegates at Tours and Bordeaux, I issued an order barring the candidature of certain individuals at the forthcoming elections; secondly, that I dissolved the departmental councils. It is quite true that I urged this latter policy on my colleagues, and that it took me some time to gain their consent.

My view is that after such a revolution as that of 4 September—the protest of outraged public feeling against the *coup d'état* and the governmental methods of the Second Empire—and after the Senate, the Legislative Body and the Council of State had been dissolved, an end

should have put then and there to the departmental councils, partly because they sprang from the same source as the central institutions of the country, and partly because, with some few exceptions, such as occurred everywhere, even in the Council of State and the Legislative Body, these departmental assemblies were the product of the very political trickery which opinion desired to bring to a close. Accordingly, from the standpoint of the special right inherent in revolutions—and there is such a right, make no mistake about that—the dissolution of the central bodies inevitably involved the dissolution of the local councils.

My colleagues appeared to concur in this view, though not in so many words; for they drew up a decree empowering the prefects of departments to prepare the local budgets for 1872. The Order dissolving the councils was issued at the end of December. Looked at from the standpoint of that special right of revolutions to which I just referred, it was overdue; but from the standpoint of administrative convenience there is no difficulty in appreciating the refusal to allow these imperial bodies to continue their functions in the year about to open.

I will go further and admit to the Commission that I had yet another ground for concern in the matter of the departmental councils. Herr von Bismarck supposed, perhaps not altogether in error, that hangers-on of the Empire were sufficiently strong in these bodies to convert them into appropriate agencies both for his own plans and for a Bonapartist restoration. Let me point out that it was Herr von Bismarck's persistent aim, perhaps not altogether abandoned even now, to confront France—the France of 4 September and the France of to-day—with a hideous choice. Either she must obey his will and perform his commands, or she must endure the return of the man of Sedan. I believe that even at this very moment we are not entirely free from the risk. I was perpetually alive to the need of disappointing the hopes which Herr von Bismarck reposed in this device, and this was one of the reasons which I urged on my colleagues in support of the Order dissolving the councils. That is all I have to say on this point.

As to the ineligibility Order, I will permit myself to observe that it was legitimately open to grave objection from the standpoint of theory and general principle. But I would ask the Commission to take note of the situation in which the country found and still finds itself in the face of Bonapartist intrigues. We have a man, Napoleon III., seizing power under circumstances which I need not recall nor condemn; the time for abuse of the Empire has gone by, the Empire itself is over and done with. But Napoleon held his power for twenty years, during which he secured an enormous following—in the army, the treasury, the public service, the police, the administration—in every rank and every class. As the author of the system, he stimulated selfish hopes for its revival, hopes which will last as long as there are Bonapartists. He has notable supporters, men of capacity, enthusiasm and daring. These men will stick at nothing to gain their ends. Their careers have owed everything to the Empire and the Emperor. They are anxious to make good their losses. They have joined together, they are prepared to tolerate, or if the Commission prefers the word, to abet, a Government

which is the sole cause of our misfortunes, of our ruin. For myself I believe that we shall never make progress until we have given short shrift to their ambitions. There is but one means to that end, and that is to forbid them to take part in politics, particularly when the foreigner is constantly intriguing with them. That was and is my feeling.

Accordingly, following the precedent of the English and Americans, people who enjoy the fullest freedom, I inflicted on the tools of the Empire the penalty of a temporary disability, which precluded them, though only for the time being, from accepting the sovereign mandate of a Member of Parliament. I maintain that since the agents of the Empire do not belong to a separate caste, forming an independent group of electors, there is no ground for the reproach that my Order lopped Parliament of a limb and outraged the supreme authority of the electorate. I issued a list of persons, individuals concerned in a political system; they were excluded by name on grounds of public policy. These were the reasons which inspired the Order prohibiting the candidature of Bonapartists. I admit that my action may seem a little abrupt according to our French way of looking at politics. But I maintain that it was right; precedents are to be found in America after the civil war and in England after the chartist riots. There are times when decisions of vital importance have to be taken, and a Government which shirked them would fail of its duty. With the support of my colleagues I saw to it that duty was done, and I pray that the present Government may never, after the next elections, regret its failure to issue a similar Order on its own behalf. I think that is about all I have to say with regard to the closing events of my term of office.

After reading the preliminaries of peace and the armistice convention; after observing that its terms, treacherously dictated by Herr von Moltke and Herr von Bismarck in contempt of the laws of war and the usages of diplomacy, completely shut out one of our armies from its provisions, thus destroying the fairest hopes of France; and after I had been tricked as to the very wording of a document which I was respecting, I offered my resignation. I was anxious to go on 30 January, but my colleagues begged me to stay; later on, in view of disagreements with the Paris Government, into which I will not enter because they involve exasperating personal matters which it will be futile to discuss here—in view of all this, I say, I took the firm line and resigned. I need not assure you that all the insulting gossip about an appeal to force planned or contemplated by me and my friends is quite devoid of foundation. Such a charge can never be brought home to me. I disdain violence. I have never rebelled and shall never rebel against the lawful Government of France."

The cross-examination was partisan in tone and not worth translating; but due note has been taken in the narrative of all the facts stated by Gambetta in his replies to questions.

APPENDIX II

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

A COMPLETE list of the authorities which require to be consulted for the life of any modern statesman would only mislead and intimidate the reader ; but it may be of interest to explain how the present biography was mainly built up.

The foundation of any book on Gambetta is necessarily M. Joseph Reinach's edition of his speeches (" Discours et plaidoyers politiques ") in eleven volumes, to which must be added the two volumes containing Gambetta's correspondence, etc., as minister in the Government of National Defence. This is the chief item of personal evidence. An equally authoritative collection of Gambetta's private letters will one day be available ; their publication will make a final biography possible. Meanwhile we must be content with fragments. The love letters are in " Le Cœur de Gambetta," by F. Laur, and the letters to his family in " Gambetta par Gambetta " by P. B. Gheusi. Both these books have been translated, not very adequately, into English. A search for further letters led to reference to the memoirs of Gambetta's friends, and first indicated the importance of Madame Adam's " Souvenirs " in seven volumes, of which the last three are mainly concerned with Gambetta. These " Souvenirs " give a great deal of Gambetta's talk and include numerous letters, the most important of which are concerned with foreign affairs. The memoirs require to be used with caution. Madame Adam had strong ideas of her own about foreign policy, and objected strongly to the pro-German sentiments which, in her view, Gambetta developed after May 1877. H. Galli's " Gambetta et L'Alsace-Lorraine " is a well documented antidote to Mme. Adam's criticisms, and a few further points have been gleaned from Lord Newton's " Life of Lord Lyons." Fifteen letters of the summer and autumn of 1869 are printed in " Gambetta inconnu " by A. Lavertujon. They show that Gambetta's educational policy was already formed, and that the idea of founding a newspaper was beginning to take shape in his mind. A few early letters are in Dr Laborde's study of Gambetta's psychology, and the later letters in Arthur Ranc's " Souvenirs et correspondance " are valuable for Gambetta's views while the Republican constitution was in the making and throw a good deal of light on his relations with Thiers.

Memoirs lead naturally to history, for some of the history of this period has been written by the actors in it. Jules Simon's " Le Gouvernement de la Défense nationale " gives the Paris point of view. E. de Marcère's " L'Assemblée nationale " and " Histoire de la République, 1876 à 1879 " are the work of a moderate Republican who

held office under MacMahon, was thoroughly critical of Gambetta's way of thought and especially of his anti-clericalism, and was never more distrustful of Gambetta than when, as in 1877, he came bearing gifts.

Of the histories in the stricter sense of the word the standard works of Taxile Delord and P. de la Gorce have been used for the latter Empire, and reference has also been made to Emile Ollivier's enormous "*L'Empire libéral*." Gabriel Hanotaux's splendid "*Histoire de la France contemporaine*" starts at the armistice and continues to Gambetta's death. Its value is enhanced by the fact that M. Hanotaux has had access to much unpublished material. Zévort's "*Histoire de la troisième République*" is of considerable value as indicating the tone of average Republican thought; but the author sometimes gives the impression that were he not a Frenchman he might be tedious. Littré's articles collected under the title, "*De l'établissement de la troisième République*," throw light on the deeper political philosophy of the time.

The period of Gambetta's dictatorship has been unduly neglected by historians. Though written a generation ago, Henri Martin's "*Histoire de la France depuis 1789*" continues the best account. Pierre Maquest's remarkable compilation, "*La France et l'Europe pendant le siège de Paris*" is a day-to-day record of events with contemporary press comments. Jules Clarétie's "*Histoire de la Révolution de 1870 et 1871*" and "*La Guerre nationale*" are indispensable, the first for its documents, the second for its intimate touches. The relevant chapters of T. Duret's "*Histoire de quatre ans (1870-3)*" are concise and accurate. On the other hand, Henri Dutrait-Crozon's "*Gambetta et la défense nationale*" should be avoided. This long pseudo-history is nothing but a systematic and blackguardly denigration of Gambetta. By a nice irony the accumulated fruits of this writer's malicious investigations were published in 1914.

The principal evidence for this period is thus to be sought in the writings of Gambetta's colleagues and especially in Freycinet's "*La Guerre en Province*" and in Steenacker's and Le Goff's "*Gouvernement de la Défense nationale en Province*." Generals D'Aurelle de Paladines and Chanzy give the story from the point of view of two soldiers with very different views of Gambetta, and Goltz's "*Gambetta und seine Armeen*" is an appreciation by a very able military historian. Elihu Washburne's "*Recollections of a Minister to France*" gives a detached but sympathetic account of the formation of the Government of National Defence.

Further details for the later period have also been found outside the histories. Camille Pelletan's "*Le Théâtre de Versailles*" is a vivid account of the National Assembly, and the memoirs of the Comte de Falloux and the Vicomte de Meaux give the royalist side of the picture. E. Daudet's "*Souvenirs de la Présidence du Maréchal de MacMahon*" is valuable for the period covered by its title.

Material for the closing phase of Gambetta's life has been taken from Freycinet's "*Souvenirs*," and Reinach's "*Le Ministère Gambetta, histoire et doctrine*," while admittedly an apologia, contains a good deal of first-hand evidence.

"Pereant qui ante nos nostra dixerunt"—though parallel passages are due to the citation of a common authority, since this book was written before any earlier life of Gambetta was examined. There are about a dozen French biographies of Gambetta, most of them the uncritical eulogies of republican enthusiasts. The best of this group are the lives by A. Barbou and H. Thurat. The anonymous "Gambetta 1869-79" contains judicious quotations from Gambetta's speeches. But all previous French biographies are put into the shade by ex-President Deschanel's well-balanced and scholarly study published in 1919.

There are two English lives, one by John Hanlon, written in 1880 and containing lively personal touches, the other by Sir F. Marzials, slight but excellent.

Gambetta has been the subject of numerable essays. Those found most helpful are by Fulbert Dumonteil, which sketches Gambetta in his first phase; by Emilio Pinchia (in Italian) for Gambetta's place in European politics; by G. W. Smalley, an obituary notice (republished in the author's "London Letters"¹) containing a vivid account of one of Gambetta's speeches; and by the Marquis de Castellane, a measured and generous appreciation.

Most of the anti-Gambettist literature is mere abuse, but the following have literary value: Georges Sand, "Journal d'un voyageur pendant la guerre"; the fourth of Alphonse Daudet's "Lettres à un absent" (afterwards much regretted by its author); Zola's article on Gambetta, contributed to the "Figaro" and republished in his book, "Une Campagne"; and Victorien Sardou's play, "Rabagas." This amusing comedy takes its title from the name of its hero-villain, a pettifogging attorney, who became dictator of Monaco. We first see him eating a heavy meal in a low class café while he describes his successful plea for a murderer acquitted that day at Nice. "Son of a murderer, a murderer himself, a disinherited member of a social order, endowed by nature with criminal and brutish instincts, Bézuchard had every right to my support. . . . What business was it of mine that he had kicked an old man to death? The guilt really rests not on the prisoner but on Nature which has given him such tigerish instincts. . . . Besides, gentlemen, who was his victim? A gamekeeper—the agent of a brutal authority. . . . Thus this alleged crime is no longer an ordinary offence. It assumes a political character and involves extenuating circumstances. To murder a gamekeeper is not to kill a man; it is to abolish a principle." Thus Sardou on the new social castes; and Gambetta's social policy is similarly parodied:—"There is no social question; there are only social positions, and a man's business is to get a good one." But the dictatorship which gives the social position aimed at lasts for one night only, and the curtain falls on Rabagas's resolve to emigrate to a country where his talents will be better appreciated—France.

This piece, long since forgotten, caused some ferment in its day.

¹ I owe these two references to my friend Mr G. E. Manwaring of the London Library.

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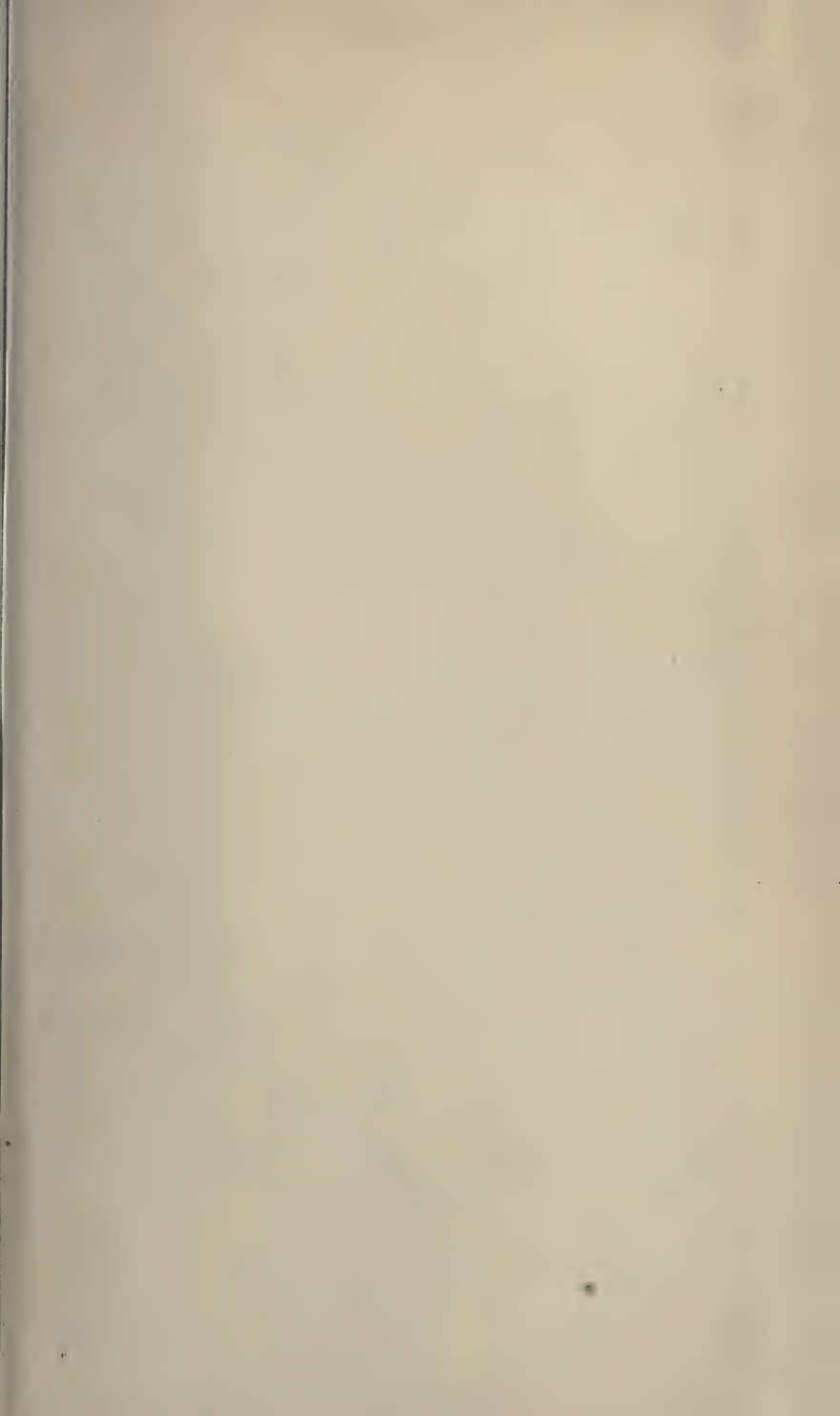
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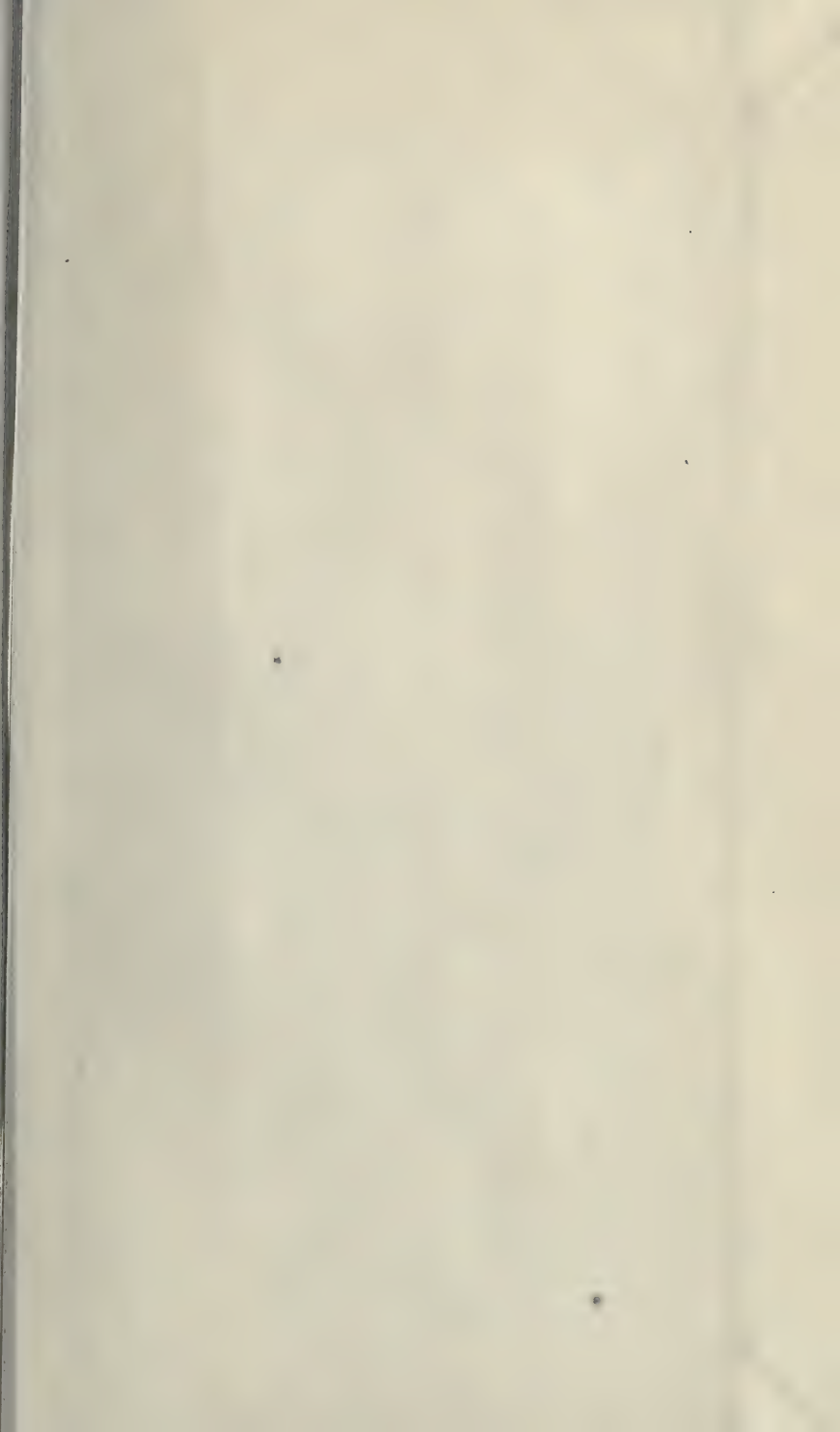
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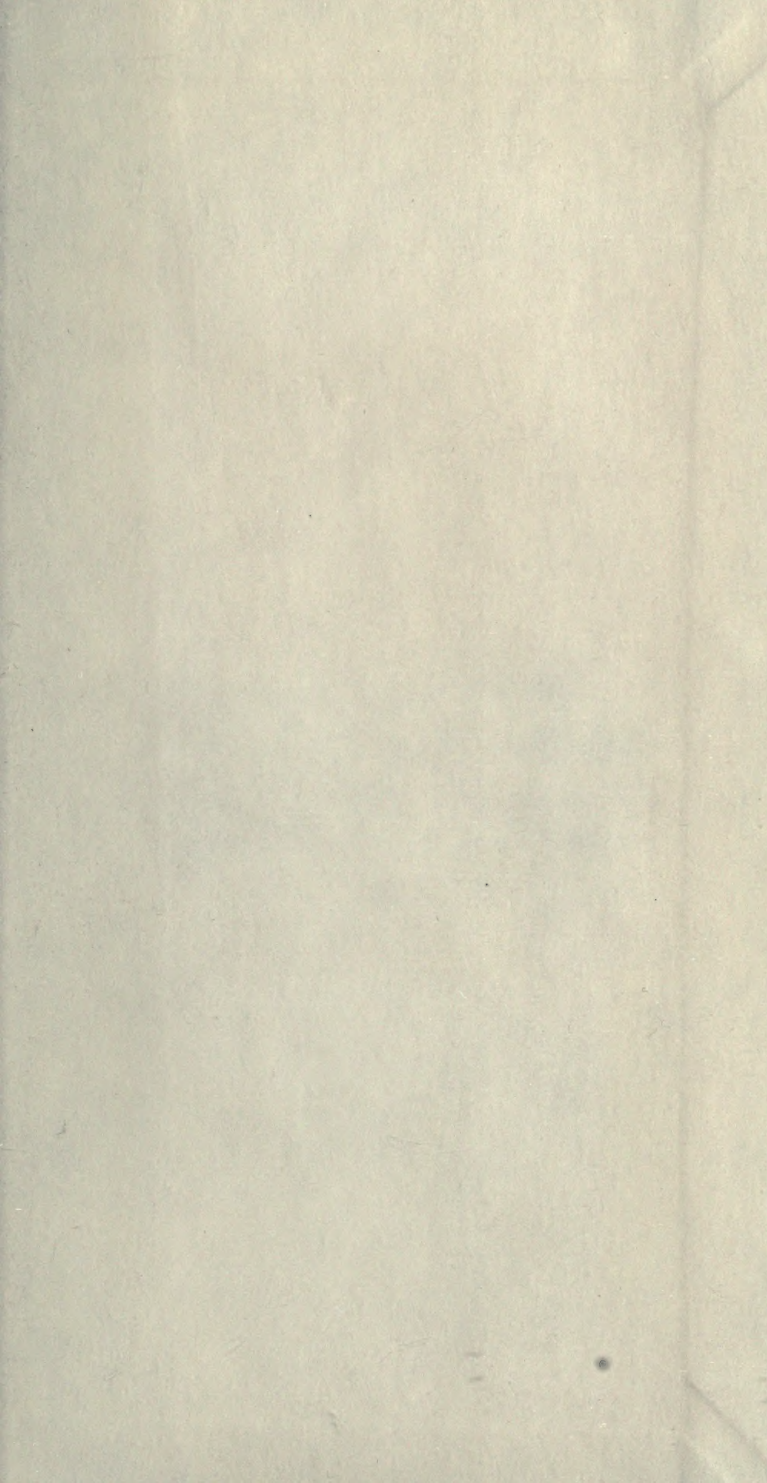
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